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ARGOSY

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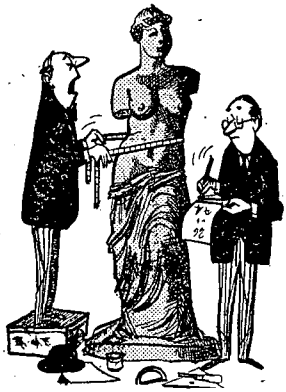

Log Book

NOT long ago we were stopped in the street, at the unpromising hour of eight-thirty on a bleak Monday morning, by an enthusiastic lady who wanted to know our opinions about radio programmes. She carried an immense form, all marked off into little squares, and we were annoyed to notice that each of our measured, well-thought-out, powerfully worded, and bitter comments was simply translated into one code symbol and marked in the appropriate square. We didn't feel that was the proper spirit in which to conduct a survey. How much more intensive and imaginative was the study of women's measurements and sizes recently undertaken by one of the ministries.

Each of the survey teams was equipped with a bag rivalling Mrs. Swiss Family Robinson's containing: three tape-measures, three skin-pencils, a box of pins, cold cream, talcum powder, a ready reckoner, and some cotton wool. Furthermore, it held a screwdriver (what can *that* have been for?), two wooden knitting-needles, a pair of scissors, two neck chains, a card of elastic cord, a protractor, two shoulder wraps, and three hair-nets.

That makes you think, doesn't it?

Brooding over this catalogue, we decided that the five thousand-odd women surveyed must have been done in batches of three, for chaperonage. The three measures, pencils, and hair-nets suggest this, anyway. When they had been thrown down, overpowered, and tied up with elastic cord—obviously no free-spirited woman would submit to such an indignity otherwise—the team got to work with the speed of ants. The victims heard no comments on the measurements recorded other than, "Cor! Chuck us over the protractor when you've finished with it."

"Screwdriver, please."

"Hurry up with that ready reckoner. Expect me to do all

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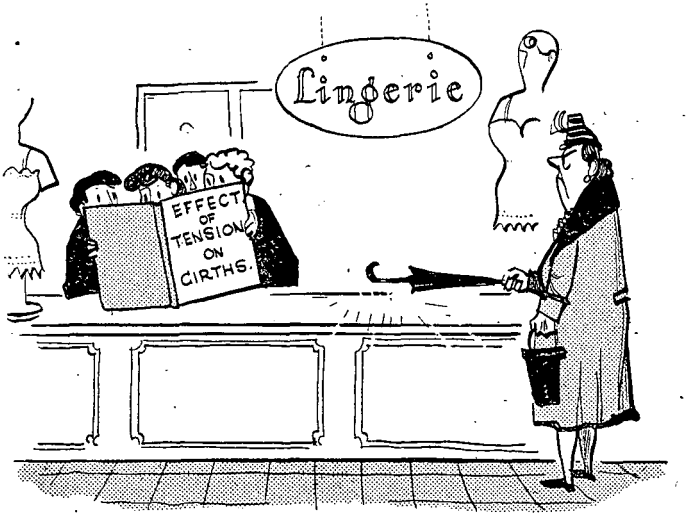
this in my head?" As there were only two neck chains and two shoulder wraps, one member of the team was always pacing about waiting for the other two to finish. The neck chains sounded unexpectedly frivolous until we remembered that surveyors carry chains; ten chains, one furlong, isn't it?

The last two members of the team, of course, were posted to keep off an inrush of hostile husbands, aunts, neighbours, and children wanting their tea. The cotton wool we assume was used for gagging, and each of the victims was presented afterwards with a dear little sextant by the grateful government.

The results of this noble survey were embodied in a report whose chapter headings read like something out of Domesday Book: "Mean weight and stature by age and marital status," "Effect of tension on girths." That's something like a survey!

If then, gentle reader, you want to send a piece of Valentine lingerie to your lady, and remembered to take your protractor and ready reckoner last time you went out with her, consult this report. She is sure to be charted somewhere in its pages.

Argosy, too, is conducting its own survey this month, and we invite readers to write in and tell us, as tersely and pungently as possible, what they like most and what they like least about the magazine. No holds barred, no time limit, and we'll pay two guineas for the most interesting comments.



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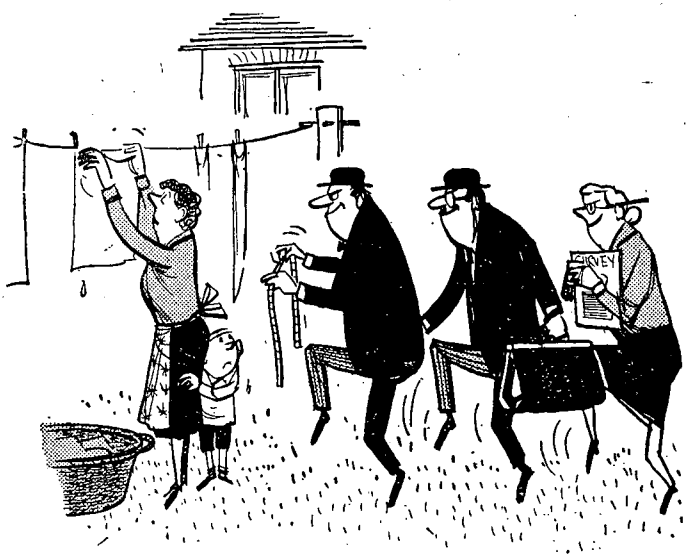
Mike, the hero of *McCreary's Luck*, has a basis in real life. When **Michael East**, his creator, an alert, humorous, six-foot Australian, was on his first trip to Europe in search of novel-fodder, he stopped off in Eritrea and met an Irishman from County Kerry who showed him the sights—mostly bandits—and had such a notable line in Celtic exaggeration that East adopted him then and there as a central character for a radio series. Another McCreary thriller was recently serialized on English commercial TV and two more are already burgeoning in the author's mind, one to be laid in Japan, which Mike East plans to visit next spring.

Five years enforced inactivity in a German prison camp, and service as A.D.C. to Lord Tweedsmuir—John Buchan—both contributed to **David Walker**'s love of writing. Born in Scotland, he now lives in a farmhouse in Canada with his wife and four small sons. Last year he went on a month's dog-sled patrol in the Canadian Arctic, of which *Dew Line Apples* is the fruit.

Walter Macken, Irish dramatist, was acting in the Galway Gaelic Theatre at the age of seventeen. Since then, he has managed, acted, and written plays for the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Mostly he prefers an Irish setting—as in his novel *The Bogman*—but his fancy can gild any scene and has done so brilliantly in his apotheosis of a sad old lion.

JOHN SILVER



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LODDEN'S PEOPLE

At every turn he feared
to meet one of them

BY JOHN SALT

THERE were times when the dream world would not live. Times when reality came pressing in too fiercely to be denied, no matter how tightly you gripped the covers of the book or stared down at the black print within its pages. For Peter Brindon this was one of the times, and he sat curled up in the low chair with his legs tucked beneath him, a pale-faced boy of about ten, watching the policeman talk to his father.

Rosewarne, the Divisional Detective Inspector from Holborn Central, he knew quite well, a tall grey man with a hard, lean face who had been kind to him while his father was away. The other who stood a little in the shadows he had not seen before and would not know again. Rosewarne addressed him as Sergeant Manbre, but to little boys like Peter Brindon the law has no name and rarely any face. It is a man in a blue uniform or a man in a dark raincoat who comes and who goes and who is answerable to none.

Peter's mother stood in the kitchen doorway, a silent witness like himself. She was young-looking, dark, and pretty, but her face showed the strain of the moment. His father, Richard Brindon, sat at a table with the window behind him. Through it poured the strong level rays of the setting sun irradiating his cropped fair hair, but accentuating his pallor and the dark smudges beneath his cheekbones and under his eyes. His hands were clenched on the table-top, and Peter knew that he was very angry.

Rosewarne spoke calmly and persuasively as one who knew himself on dangerous ground, his voice was muted yet clear.

"It isn't easy to start again," he said. "Even after only six months inside. You'll find faces turned and doors closed to you." He paused a moment, then went on. "It's the way things go and you may find yourself drifting back into the wrong company. And that will only mean more trouble."

His words fell into a hostile silence and he put a hand into his jacket pocket, took out a card, and laid it on the table.

"It's the address of a garage," he explained. "You'll get a place there with no questions asked."

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Peter's eyes were intent upon his father's face and words trembled on his tongue. But Brindon threw the card from him. It fluttered aimlessly to the floor, making his violence seem foolish. He got up and turned his back on the two policemen.

Rosewarne shrugged his shoulders and looked across at the boy. "How's school?" he questioned gently.

Peter jerked his head down and stared unseeingly at his book; he did not answer. If he had kept his head up, the Inspector would have seen his tears and thought him afraid or ashamed, and in a sense he would have betrayed his father. And that was a thing Peter Brindon could never do.

Rosewarne and his assistant went away and then May Brindon said quietly to her husband, "You could have been more friendly, Dick. He only wanted to help."

"His kind have helped enough already," Brindon said bitterly, and sat down again at the table.

"What will you do now?"

"I don't know, May. I just don't know."

But Peter knew. Indeed, they all knew that there had been only one answer from the very beginning. Brindon would go back to work for Doll Lodden and become once again one of Lodden's People like so many of those who lived and worked in the teeming area between St. Giles High Street and Covent Garden, driving a myriad trades in the raucous lanes and alleys which bisect and bedevil the district and trickle down, humbled at last between tall buildings, to drown in the swifter currents of Wellington Street and the Strand.

Rosewarne in his mind and on his wall map designated this district as Section J. It was just a part of his manor, but to Peter it was home and the people in it his neighbours and friends. It was true that the law ran well enough in Section J: owners who left their cars parked in a yellow-band area were suitably fined; shopping-bags and purses were reasonably safe; and no plain murder was done in the open streets. But in fact the real law that ran so deep in that Section, as Peter knew too well, was the law of the jungle, and its supreme arbiter of all causes, the high, the middle, and the low, was Doll Lodden.

None of this was obvious. It was a business district largely taken up by the market; full of shops, warehouses, and restaurants, some of the gown and some of the theatre trade. But in among all these legitimate enterprises were Lodden's People, a tiny percentage, little known and less regarded, who worked in their half-world for a powerful man who protected and paid them and sometimes—when it paid him—betrayed them.

That had happened to Richard Brindon and now he was a lag,

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a professional with the stamp of prison on him, the sort that the Doll liked to keep about him, one of a dozen other expendables who would be used for small jobs because they had no other place to turn. One of Lodden's People.

All this May Brindon knew, and at times she had almost lost heart. But then she had looked at her son and her husband and taken fresh courage. She did so now, and Peter watched her stoop and pick up the tiny oblong of pasteboard.

"Try it, Dick," she said gently.

He took it from her and turned it over in his hand, then put it in his pocket and went out without a word to either of them. May Brindon sat down beside Peter and took his hand.

The garage was near St. Paul's and Brindon was engaged at once. For six weeks Lodden left him alone and the Brindons began to hope that they had been forgotten. Every evening after school Peter would go round to see his father at the garage and later travel home with him.

Peter noticed the change in his father at the end of the sixth week, and on the following Monday, the Doll himself came to the garage, walking with mincing tread round the puddles of oil and sludge on the concrete floor, and making towards the repair bay where Brindon was at work. There were two men with the Doll and Peter drew back to let them go by, then ducked down behind a car where he could hear without being seen.

Lodden wore a double-breasted suit of pearl-grey, cut narrow at the waist and padded on the shoulders, the whole designed to offset his lack of height and thickness of figure. The light from an inspection lamp twinkled in the toe-caps of his tiny brown shoes and the pebble glass of his spectacles.

He looked benevolent, almost timid, at a distance, but on closer inspection Lodden was seen to be a grotesque. The Doll of his nickname was underworld slang, but in simpering china or plastic his face would not have seemed out of place on the jointed body of a little girl's toy. His face was pink and white, the cheeks round and dimpled, the chin tiny, and the mouth above it full-lipped and wetly red. The round, myopic blue eyes bulged from their sockets and the distortion was horribly magnified by the thick glass of the spectacles.

These blue eyes were foreign to mercy or human understanding, and just as a china doll would smile and simper while the house burnt around it, so Lodden went through the world using men as marketable commodities yet was never himself a part of mankind. Now he meant to use Richard Brindon, and his tight smile and wary eyes betrayed his intention.

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Peter saw his father straighten from his work and wearily begin to wipe his hands with a bundle of cotton waste. Lodden continued to smile, and spoke in a low, oddly pedantic voice, without strong inflection or local accent. "You've had a nice rest, Dick. Time to work again now. I hope you've been thinking over what I said, because I shall need you tonight."

Brindon jerked his head up and looked around him. The garage was closed for the night and the other mechanics had gone. It was safe to talk. "You mean Zookrow's, the fur warehouse in Camomile Street?"

"The very same," Lodden went on, with a note of warning in his voice. "How does the idea strike you now?"

"Do I have any choice?"

Lodden said silkily, "Well now, Dick, that's up to you. I'm never the man to drive. Just make up your mind and tell me what it's to be." One of the men by his side stirred suddenly and laughed. It had an evil sound and Peter shuddered in his hiding-place.

There was a long moment of silence, then his father spoke again, "All right, I'm on."

"I am so glad," said Lodden, and then his manner became contemptuous and authoritative. "You know what has been agreed and you will do precisely what you are told, no more and certainly no less. We shall keep to an exact time-table and there will be a clear two hours for the job. All you'll do is drive, Dick Brindon, so keep a clear head and govern that awkward conscience of yours, or you'll be seeing the Old Street magistrate in the morning instead of your wife and kid."

Peter crouched lower in the shadows as Lodden's party went by, then when the sound of footsteps had died away, he crept out and ran towards the door, away from the place where his father stood. He heard his shout, "Peter, Peter, come back here," and then he was out and running into the dusk with a burning pain of unshed tears in his throat and chest.

He ran and walked through the homegoing crowds down Ludgate Hill, and wandered after that far west across London to Marble Arch and entered the Park, walking round it until fatigue overcame him, and he lay down in darkness among trees by the Serpentine and wept until he could weep no more. Then, moving mechanically, he boarded a late bus to Liverpool Street and so into Bishopsgate and Camomile Street. Passing a building-site, he noticed a pile of bricks on the other side of a low wall. He stopped and leaned over; there was no one about. Quickly he snatched a half-brick from the top, then went on down the empty street.

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The fur warehouse was easy to find, a tall, dark building with some fifty feet of frontage and a timbered fence to one side with locked double gates. Peter took up his position across the road from the warehouse in the dark porch of a banking-house. There he sat to watch and wait for Lodden's People.

The big blue van came down the street soon after midnight and drove straight into the yard of the building, through the yard gates which Peter saw were opened from inside. In the darkness he could not be sure how many men were in the van nor whether his father was among them; he waited, in the cold and the rain, in an agony of fear and indecision.

At last he heard the engine start again, and the wide yard doors swung slowly open. This time he had a clear view and realized, with a great surging lift of relief, that the driver was not his father. Two other men climbed into the back of the van after closing the yard gates; they were the men he had seen earlier at the garage. And next to the driver sat Lodden himself.

Something—at the time it seemed blind impulse—moved Peter: his right arm swung over and lobbed the half-brick through the frosted glass of the bank window behind him.

The night silence was rent at once by the jangling clangour of an alarm bell, and lights flashed on automatically all over the building. Peter heard dimly the shrill of a police whistle and then he was blinded by the sudden glare of headlamps as the heavy van surged across the road and mounted the pavement. The driver wrenched the wheel round at the last moment, but the nearside front wheel grazed Peter's toes as it skidded by. Then in the white glare from the bank windows he saw Lodden's doll-face distorted with a terrible fury and knew that the evil little man had seen and recognized him.

Even then he stayed a second longer, in time to see the headlamps pick up the figure of a policeman running towards the warehouse. The van went straight at him and the constable, too late in his leap for safety, was picked up by the offside wing and hurled into the farther gutter. Peter started to run, his shadow leaping ahead of him from street lamp to street lamp.

Crossing Tower Hill, he skirted All Hallows and dived down Seething Lane towards the river. There he halted. For a second he thought of going to Rosewarne but swiftly abandoned the idea. To talk to policemen meant involving his father who, even if he had not been on the raid, had at least known of it and could have laid information to prevent it. Go home he dared not, for Lodden had seen him and would set spies there to take him sooner or later.

Downstream by Tower Bridge a tall ship lay loading against a

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wharf, her sides sheer and dazzling white beneath floodlights. Peter gazed at her wistfully, then turned up the collar of his thin summer jacket, and walked on, through early-waking Billingsgate to Blackfriars.

The rain had stopped but the pavements were still black with it, and the green leaves of the trees shone polished and wet high up among the lamps along the Embankment. The road to Westminster was too bright and perilous; Peter turned left and crossed the bridge to the south side of the river. He was barely dragging himself along by now, his feet burnt, and his head swam with fatigue. A mile along the way he came upon a small park, a dark and dusty pleasance of stunted shrubs and dried-up grass, which had been created on the cleared site of some bombed building.

The place seemed deserted and he made for a bench set far back from the light and slumped down on it, with his head falling forward upon his chest. But after only a few moments a rustling sound alerted him with fresh terror. He glanced sharply around. A bundle of newspapers fell from the other end of the bench, and a dark shadow rose up.

It was an old woman, clad in blackened rags and crowned with an old-fashioned bucket hat whose tattered, fraying straw hung in lank wisps about her sunken face. She craned towards him, servile yet threatening, with lips drawn back from gaping teeth and sharp eyes a-glitter. Her voice was thick and husky, and one talon of a hand crept along the back of the bench as if to seize him. "You run away from 'ome, young 'un?"

Peter, shivering and terrified, could not answer her.

"Well, you're a stuck-up little tyke and no mistake." Then ingratiatingly, in an artful whine, "Come on, son, spare a couple of bob for poor Daisy. She ain't eaten all day, that's gospel, not a bite nor sup." She was close to him now, breathing into Peter's face while the talon fondled his shoulder.

He shrank away from her and dug one hand into his trouser pocket. "I've only got two sixpences," he said.

She snatched them from him, giggling and mumbling to herself, then angrily demanded more, shaking him with both her hands on his shoulders. He put up his hand and was trying to push her off when a young, fresh-faced police constable loomed up over them.

"She's taken all my money," Peter sobbed.

"Has she, now? Come along, Daisy. I'm surprised at you—up to your old larks again so soon. Give the kid his money back and then we'll see if we can't find you a home. I know just the place, you were there only the other night if you remember."

She writhed in his grasp, but the policeman held her fast and

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made her give the sixpences back. Then, still holding her, he spoke to Peter. "What about you, young nipper? Bit late to be out, isn't it? What's the trouble, have you lost your way or your folks, which is it?"

Peter shook his head dumbly.

"Lost your tongue too, have you? Right, then you'd better come along with me and Daisy. We'll fix you up. A cup of tea and something hot wouldn't come amiss now, would it?"

For a moment Peter wavered; then fear took charge once more, and he ran off wildly. Back at the bridge, he scrambled down into the shadows by the river wall. In a derelict wharf he found a pile of sacks and, crawling beneath them, fell at once into a deep and dreamless sleep.

At nine the next night he slipped stealthily down to the Waterloo Road, where the crowds were thickest, walking purposefully, as if he knew where he was going. Hardly anyone looked at the pale-faced, long-legged boy with grey dust upon the back of his jacket and trousers. But to Peter every glance was a challenge, and he expected to meet Doll Lodden or one of his people at every turn of the shabby streets.

He spent threepence of his tiny store on chipped potatoes in a fried-fish shop and scurried back with the packet to the wharf that now represented home and safety. Near the station he picked up a discarded evening newspaper from the pavement, then hurried on again. Hard by the wharf was a building-site and Peter drank there from a standpipe. The brackish water chilled but did not refresh him and he huddled afterwards in a corner of his refuge with sacks about his shoulders, shivering while he ate the wadded, congealing chips.

The light from a gas lamp on the wharf shone through a gaping hole in the brickwork of one wall; by it he read the paper he had found. There was a follow-up story about the fur robbery on the front page. The haul had been worth thirty thousand pounds, which explained Lodden's own presence on the raid, for he only risked a direct hand in the really big jobs. The getaway van had been found abandoned and empty early that morning in a back street off the Borough Market.

The final paragraph of the story confirmed all Peter's fears, and he knew himself to be the sole witness to a deliberate killing, for the injured constable had died in the hospital casualty ward without regaining consciousness.

For hours before sleep came, Peter lay staring up at the stars through the broken hanging rafters of the roof, striving to clear his mind and think of a plan. Lodden, he guessed, would set

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his People to seek and to find . . . Their own freedom—perhaps the very lives of some—depended upon finding him. And they would find him, Peter felt quite sure of that. He shivered again, vainly seeking warmth among the musty sacks.

Day came, with sick hunger and thirst. He took refuge in things past and tried to remember the happy times. Like other children in the neighbourhood, he had known of Lodden and suspected his father's association with him. But things had gone on quietly enough; Peter did well at school and had many friends. And then his father's prison sentence and an end to all security.

Peter had been forced to grow up overnight. He turned a sullen face on the world, rebuffing the well-meant kindness of men like Rosewarne.

There was so much he would have liked to say, but he knew in his heart that a man like Rosewarne would understand, without being told, that it was possible to throw a brick through a window to raise an alarm and get Lodden shopped, even to risk his own life to destroy Lodden and save his father; but never possible to inform against his own kind, to go to the police with a whining tale. For that was betrayal in Section J. He had no long words to describe it, but this was a kind of inverted loyalty long inbred, a loyalty that worked perhaps against himself in the long run, for men like Lodden traded and waxed fat upon it. One day he would grow up and go right away from Section J.

In the late evening he crept out again to the shop and spent the rest of his money on food and a mug of tea. He wandered back light-headedly to the wharf, hardly caring whether he were discovered or not. Then he cleaned himself as best he could, rubbed at his face with a handkerchief, dragged a gap-toothed comb through matted hair, and left the building without a backward glance.

On the corner of Stamford Street by a public house he noticed a tall man in a stained raincoat and soft hat. As Peter went by, he could feel the stranger's eyes on his back. His instinct was to run, but he fought down the panic fear and moved fast across the bridge. On the north side he chanced a backward glance and pure horror shafted through him, for the stranger was within a dozen paces and gaining fast. This time Peter did run, darting to the right down the stairs that led to the Embankment.

A west-bound bus waited for the lights to change at the foot of Savoy Hill and Peter dashed across and leapt aboard as it moved off. The conductor motioned him to a seat and stretched out a hand for the fare, but the bus was slowing again for Charing Cross and Peter jumped to the pavement. He did not know how much time he had gained and dared not look to see. Ignoring

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the wildly swerving traffic, he ran across the road, and raced up the shallow steps into the booking-hall of the Underground Station. He made for the nearest barrier and, dodging the ticket collector, ran down two escalators to the platform level.

A Bakerloo train drew in and the doors slid wide, but Peter's way was barred by two women gossiping together by the crush barrier at the entrance to the platform. Beside himself with the urgency of his fear, Peter beat frantically upon the back of the nearer woman. "Move, move, please move, lady. I must get on that train."

The woman turned an outraged face, and then a heavy hand fell upon Peter's shoulder and a voice said, "All right, son. Calm down now, I've got you." It was the man in the raincoat.

Detective Sergeant Jack Manbre felt that he had good reason to congratulate himself as he steered Peter into a telephone box and began to dial Rosewarne's number. He had followed a hunch down to Stamford Street after reading the report of a constable from the Borough who had arrested a drunken woman vagrant and attempted to question a young boy who had been with her.

Rosewarne's reception of his news was strangely cool; to Manbre's surprise the Inspector told him to take the boy to a nearby café and wait for him there. Ten minutes later Peter was eating his first proper meal in three days.

When he had finished, Rosewarne said quietly, "Want to tell us anything, old chap?"

Peter looked hard at him, wondering how much the policeman knew, how much his parents had said. Rosewarne seemed to sense his thought. "What made you run off like that?" he asked, still kindly.

Peter said in a muffled voice, "I was fed up at home."

The Inspector shook his head and Peter's heart sank. "It won't do, you know, Peter. You scared your mother half out of her wits, if that's any satisfaction to you."

Peter's eyes began to fill and he stared down at his plate.

Rosewarne's voice softened again but his next question was hard enough. "I think we know most of what there is to know, but there are some points that only you can clear up. Now tell me, Peter, were you in Camomile Street that night, and did you give the alarm?"

Peter shook his head, but Rosewarne went on inexorably, "Did you go there because of something you had heard at the garage the night that Lodden came to see your father?"

Peter looked up sharply then, and the Inspector nodded. "Yes, we've talked to your father and mother."

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"They didn't tell you anything," Peter retorted hotly.

Rosewarne smiled then, a slow smile which quite transformed his lean, tired features. "No," he admitted. "You're quite right, they didn't tell me a thing. But you did expect to see your Dad that night, didn't you? Well, he wasn't there because he had a broken arm. Does that surprise you? He must have done it soon after you left that night. An accident with a lifting-jack, he told us. An accident with a purpose do you suppose, young Peter? What would you say?"

A rare joy filled Peter's heart and for just a moment the old fears and the old loyalties were in the melting-pot. This policeman was a friend and he should have gone to him at once. But Lodden remained . . .

Again the Inspector seemed to know what was in his mind, for he sighed gently and said to Manbre, "Lodden has left his hunting-grounds, flitted this morning with most of his followers. His place has been cleared, too, lock, stock, and barrel—we searched it this afternoon on the off chance and unofficially. Not a sniff of anything."

Peter was conscious of something unspoken between the two officers, but Manbre sounded a little bewildered as he said slowly, "Then he has slipped through our fingers?"

"It seems so," the Inspector admitted cheerfully.

"And the next move?"

"Is to send young Peter home to the tanning he deserves. What do you say, youngster? Can you make it back on your own? I don't suppose you want to sail home in a police car and set the neighbours talking again."

Peter nodded and looked hard at the Inspector. There was something here that he had only just understood, but he looked in vain for a sign in that lean, stern face that he and the police officer were of one mind. The last picture he retained in his mind as he slipped away into Villiers Street was of the two policemen sitting together at the table with never a word to say. But in any case for Peter there was no need for more to be said, for now he knew what he had to do.

They picked him up in Otway Street within a dozen yards of home. Two of Lodden's People, the two he had seen at the garage and again at the fur warehouse. He recognized the driver too, but no words were spoken as they bundled him into the back seat of a long green car, which took an eastward route from Holborn. Peter did not attempt to struggle. He sat back against the car cushions between the silent men and found himself beyond even fear.

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The car sped through the darkened and deserted City, past the scene of the raid, and then down Commercial Road into Stepney and on to Poplar. There it swung south again and came close to the river where it looped round the Isle of Dogs and flowed on past Blackwall. Now they were in the lee of a long wall over which the masts and lifting-gear of cargo ships reared stark against the night sky.

Heavy timber doors ground back on iron hinges, and the car stopped in the cobbled yard of a tall wharf building. Peter was pushed through a narrow door into a vast warehouse whose cement floor was littered with packing-cases and half-filled tea-chests. Men were moving about, packing the crates with feverish haste. Through another wider door onto the river Peter could see the upper works of a large seagoing launch.

The men hustled him up an iron staircase that climbed in staggered diagonal flights up one wall to an office, set high to command a view of the whole interior of the building. In the office Lodden was checking lists of goods with a stub of red pencil. He straightened up and took a quick pace forward. "You took your time," he said in a hard voice.

The taller of Peter's captors shrugged and spoke sullenly: "It wasn't easy."

"Nothing is easy," Lodden snapped, "except being stupid. Has he talked to any law?"

The tall man was subdued. "Would they have let him go if they'd pinched him first? If they knew what we know?"

"They know, we know," Lodden mimicked him. "Get to hell out of here, the two of you, and lend a hand with that loading. We go down-river on the ebb."

The two men went out and Peter was alone with Lodden. Once again he knew fear, but a glance at Lodden told him that the Doll, too, was far from happy; he looked hunted, and his face had a pinched and waxen pallor.

"What are you going to do with me?" Peter asked.

Lodden looked down at him and his bulging myopic eyes were oddly remote; his voice, too, seemed to come from very far away. "Do?" he asked. "Why, nothing very much, Peter, we are just going to take you for a little sail, somewhere out beyond the Nore perhaps. You'll like that now, won't you? The sea air will suit a bright lad like you." He took another step forward, and his fat little hand on Peter's shoulder had a grip of steel.

A rending crash as the wharf gates were forced gave the first alarm, and Lodden rushed out onto the landing in time to see the first wave of police led by Rosewarne and Manbre surge in among the milling crowd of men below.

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Lodden drew back hurriedly. He locked the door and switched off the light, and then spoke softly in a voice that was taut and trembling. "They don't know we are up here yet. But they'll come, oh yes, they'll come. And when they do they'll find something waiting for them."

He dragged Peter to his desk and with his free hand tugged open a drawer and took out a revolver. "Now we'll wait, you and I, we'll just wait and see what happens." He held Peter so tightly that the boy could hardly breathe.

They had not long to wait; by degrees the noise of battle subsided, and then came the clumping footsteps of two men mounting the iron staircase. For Peter the room exploded in a split second of blinding light and deafening sound as Lodden fired one shot through the frosted glass of the door. They heard the clanging ricochet as the bullet hit the ironwork outside. Then, after a pause, the clumping footsteps again.

Lodden called out, his voice high-pitched, almost falsetto, and Peter could feel the Doll's body trembling against him. "Stop where you are, Inspector—you and your friend."

The mounting footsteps ceased, then came Rosewarne's voice, echoing and clear. "Have you gone mad, Lodden? Drop that gun and come out here with the boy." Again there came the stealthy sound of an upward tread.

"Stay where you are," Lodden warned at once. "Sound carries up here and I can hear every movement." His voice was quite crazed now. "Listen, Inspector, listen very carefully. You must not come any closer or I shall hurt Peter. I shall hurt him very badly, do you hear that?"

Rosewarne called back, "Don't make it any worse for yourself, Lodden. You haven't a hope, so come out quietly with the boy."

In the silence that followed Peter could hear the mumbling voices of Rosewarne and Manbre talking quietly together.

"Are you coming?" the Inspector called again.

For answer Lodden fired a second shot through the door and there was a shout from Manbre as a slug ripped through his sleeve.

"They will try to rush me now," Lodden said in a quiet and conversational tone of voice. "I shall have to kill you after all, Peter."

Lodden's gun-hand was a blur of white in the darkness. Suddenly the boy strained forward against the madman's arm and bit hard. Lodden screamed; the gun clattered to the floor. Peter tore himself loose and dived after it.

His finger sought and found the trigger, and he went on pulling and firing, pulling and firing into the wall while Lodden tore and

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struck at his unguarded back and head. The hammer rose and fell for the fifth time but there was no answering report. He let go of the gun and rolled over with his arms up to protect his face.

With one bound Lodden was at the window and had shattered the glass and clambered through by the time Rosewarne and Manbre burst into the room. Rosewarne climbed out after Lodden, and Peter, dazed and shaken, staggered across to the window and knelt there with Manbre supporting him to watch the closing scene of the drama.

A greasy wooden catwalk ran across the riverfront of the wharf to a swivel crane mounted on a wall bracket. Lodden pelted along the catwalk, his feet slapping wetly on the boards. Rosewarne followed him gingerly, hugging the blackened brickwork of the warehouse. Below them the river swirled, oily and black as the ebb-tide flowed.

Lodden had reached the crane now and was swinging it out from the wall. It had rested there unused for years and the hinges screamed as he forced it round. Rosewarne neared him but his progress was painfully slow. Lodden had the crane in position and, with one arm wrapped around the wall bracket, he reached with the other to disengage the loading-hook. It was too far out for him and he shifted his grip to get a longer reach.

Far below a River Police launch came about in a wide circle and its searchlight swept the wall, passing over Lodden and then returning to pinpoint him. Even at the window Peter was close enough to hear the Doll's sobbing, deep-drawn breaths as he tried and failed again to reach the slowly swinging hook.

Step by step Rosewarne came on and his hand was on the little man's shoulder when Lodden jumped. For a second his body splayed like a giant bat in the searchlight's beam, then with a wild yell, part terror, part triumph, the Doll's hands closed upon the hook. The stranded, rotting cable parted in the same instant, and Lodden's outward leap became a downward plunge.

Peter heard the sodden thump as his body landed on the quay some sixty feet below, and he laid his head down against the damp sill of the window and closed his eyes . . .

There was no talk on the journey back to Otway Street and Peter slept most of the way, his head on Rosewarne's shoulder. The Inspector carried him up to the flat and there Brindon took his son and laid him carefully on a bed. May Brindon, brisk and capable, wasted no time with questions but set to work at once with hot water and towels to bathe her son's bruised face.

Brindon, weary with sleepless nights and days of searching the streets for his son, faced Rosewarne with an unspoken query.

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"Lodden's dead," the Inspector said brusquely. "You'll read it in the papers in an hour or two."

"Do you want me to talk?"

"I asked you once before and you wouldn't. Now you've left it a little late and you can thank your lucky stars for that. You can save your breath now, I've all the information I need and I'll not be raking up old scores."

Brindon looked at him gratefully. "What about my boy?"

"Your boy's a bit of a hero, Dick Brindon. He'll maybe get something for this night's work."

"And you?" Brindon asked in a strangely respectful voice. "What will you get?"

"The sack, I shouldn't wonder," Rosewarne replied, and he was very far from joking. "I'd like another word with Peter, though, if May has finished cleaning him up."

Brindon nodded towards the bedroom door and Rosewarne went in. Peter greeted him with a wan smile as the Inspector sat down on the foot of the bed. He seemed a very warm and human person now, and his opening words came as no shock. "You knew what I wanted from you, didn't you, Peter?"

"I knew they would be waiting for me, yes."

"I couldn't give you any warning. You see, Peter, things like this are hardly in the book of rules, and it will still take some explaining to the Assistant Commissioner. But I had to find Lodden with the goods on him and I knew that you were the only bait to which he would rise. You knew that, too. Mind, if you had turned tail I should not have blamed you. But this is a thing between ourselves. You realize that?"

Peter nodded gravely, and the tall man stood up and looked down at him with an infinite solicitude. Suddenly he stretched out a hand and touched the spreading bruise beneath Peter's left eye. "You're going to have such a shiner there," he said, and went away, smiling. Peter watched him go.

He would forget about the Doll and he would forget the grey policeman, but just for a while, just for a small part of his young life, he had been one of Lodden's People and had survived.

Through the bedroom door he heard his parents' thanks and Rosewarne's grumbled good-bye; then he turned his bruised face into the pillow and went to sleep.

★ ★ ★

ROUGH PLAY

Skiffle is a kind of do-it-yourself music and often sounds like it.

TED HEATH

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SPANISH GRANDMOTHER

He removed the firing-pin and then he proposed

BY FRANCIS FYTTON

IN the long summer evenings, when the chirping of the grasshoppers kept even the servants awake, Spanish Grandmother liked to settle down on the verandah steps with a black cheroot and shoot empty corn-cob tins off the back wall. The old lady used a very curious revolver: a Colt .45 with the foresight and trigger filed away. She fired it by thumbing the hammer, or sometimes, for speed, by fanning the hammer with the horn-hard heel of her left hand. Spanish Grandmother, the neighbours said, didn't need the foresight because she could shoot so good; and its absence was like a boast.

This modified .45 was the weapon with which Spanish Grandmother had defended the hacienda against the rebels during the successful Revolution of '98 by which the Filipinos had won their independence from her countrymen. The gun had also played a part in defending the Islands in '42, when the old lady used it to ambush an advancing Japanese regiment. It had eight notches in the butt: three old ones on the left for rebels, five new ones on the right for the Japanese.

Conchita's earliest memories were of recovering the tins and setting them up again for the old lady; she could not remember picking up a tin that did not have a hole in it.

In the morning, José, the butler, would shake his head over the collection of spent shells and cheroot stubs on the verandah. The stubs, ground out beneath Spanish Grandmother's high-heeled boots, made black scorchmarks on the otherwise immaculate white boards. These marks José would remove by scrubbing, or sandpapering, or—in dire cases—by planing away the defaced wood. For this reason the planking of the verandah was frequently renewed, since it was José's special pride.

On such mornings José would go to Spanish Grandmother and say, "I resign. I am not used to working for people with filthy habits. I cannot go on."

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And Spanish Grandmother would retort, " You do not resign. You are fired. You are filthy and lazy and insubordinate. Also, you have been eating garlic, which is the one Spanish custom I cannot bear."

This conversation took place, on an average, three times a week. José had been in the service of Spanish Grandmother, and of her father before, for sixty-two years. On mornings when he was in a good temper, José would merely remark, " My father warned me against working for Spaniards. Why can you not wear shoes as befits your position? "

To which Spanish Grandmother would reply, " I wear boots the better to kick impertinent servants, peon." No one could recollect Spanish Grandmother kicking anyone, but she would often remark, " I had to kick José out of the house this morning. I knew he would never make a good butler."

The boots in question were Spanish Grandmother's favourite and, indeed, only articles of footwear. They were made caballero style, of soft black leather, which José kept polished to a mirrorlike surface. They were ornamented with silver stars and box spurs. When first made, before the turn of the century, such things were not unusual for a ranchero's daughter who was fond of riding.

" These boots," Spanish Grandmother would say, " were bought for me by my father in '97, and I've worn them continuously ever since. That is more than half a century. They don't make boots like that nowadays."

Then she would continue, " In these boots I hope to die. That is my one remaining ambition. Should I have the misfortune to die in bed, I charge thee, Conchita, my grand-daughter, to place them on my feet."

Conchita would say, " Yes, lola abuela."

" A sentimental woman would wish to have the boots placed on her coffin," Spanish Grandmother would proceed. " I am a Spaniard. I am not sentimental. I want those boots with me in my coffin. I shall know that no one else can wear them."

Then the old lady would go out on the verandah and shoot some more.

The neighbours seemed to have grown accustomed to the intermittent small-arms fire. At least, they never protested and Conchita would see them bring friends to watch Spanish Grandmother from their windows. If the old lady happened to spot them, she would brandish her revolver and call them " indios," a term rarely heard in the Islands since the departure of the last Spanish soldier. But people seldom stayed to argue.

There were, however, sometimes strangers, visitors to the district, who did not know Spanish Grandmother, and who tried

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to make trouble when the ricochets flew over their heads. That usually meant a visit from Mariano, the local constable, who lived in a bungalow close by with his wife and nine daughters and little son, Leon, who was Conchita's playmate. Mariano's house was always called The Post, because it was said to be the police post; this puzzled Conchita, as it had just an ordinary white-painted clapboard fence, like all the other bungalows that were built in the grounds of what had been Spanish Grandmother's ranch before the Revolution. The hacienda had a fence on three sides and one earth-banked ten-foot brick wall for Spanish Grandmother's target practice.

When Mariano came, looking very stern and official in his neatly-pressed khaki uniform with a regulation .45 in a polished black leather holster, Spanish Grandmother would lose her temper and demand to know what right the police had to pester a peaceable Spanish citizen.

"My ambassador will take the matter up with your government," she would say, snapping her long bejewelled fingers like castanets in the constable's face. "I will have you dismissed from the force for bullying a poor, defenceless old woman."

Then Mariano would explain that since Spanish Grandmother had married a Filipino, she was now a subject of his government; and Spanish Grandmother would appear to fly into a rage and shout, "So you would call me a liar to my face, would you, indio? We shall soon see whose hand is the steadiest!"

With this alarming threat, Spanish Grandmother would snatch Mariano's revolver from its holster—and Conchita would wonder why he left the holster unfastened—and march round the verandah to the back of the house. Mariano would set up the corn-cob tins on the wall and Spanish Grandmother would fire six rounds from his Colt, kneeling on the verandah and shooting through the trellis until the petals of the climbing roses turned black with cordite. Then she would bring her own revolver and a box of ammunition from the house, and reload both guns while Mariano set up more tins. After the tins they would set up matchboxes, and sometimes matches, stuck erect in the wall; and Spanish Grandmother's slugs would strike head after head, so that the phosphorus flared as the bullets ignited the matches, like surprised glow-worms in the dusk.

Spanish Grandmother would always win these contests, and afterwards she and Mariano would drink black coffee laced with brandy and smoke cheroots, while Mariano composed a report to his superiors, explaining that the old lady used the gun only to scare off marauding crows, and to keep down snakes, and to protect the honour of her orphaned grand-daughter, Conchita.

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Then Mariano would go home and practise some more with his revolver in anticipation of the next complaint. Every year he carried off the police trophy for marksmanship. But he never beat Spanish Grandmother.

When Conchita was seven, Spanish Grandmother said to her, "Child, you have now reached what the Church calls the age of reason: so you must learn to handle firearms, thereby ensuring that the exercise of reason shall never be molested by mere force."

"O.K., Grandmomma," said Conchita. She was used to her grandmother's queer speeches because she knew that, even after half a century, the old lady didn't speak good English. "But tell me, Grandmomma, what is an indio?"

"An Indian, a native—Filipinos they call themselves now."

"Aren't you a Filipino? Is that why they call you Spanish Grandmother?"

"Of course, I am Spanish. I was born in Toledo. Toledo ladies, my father used to say, are like Toledo blades: the straightest, the strongest, the most finely-tempered and flashing in the world." Spanish Grandmother drew herself up to her full five foot nine: she was the tallest woman in Cebu. For a moment she really looked like a true consort of the conquistadores, not just a rather swarthy old lady in black boots and black lace.

"Please, Grandmomma, then what was Grandpop?"

"He was a gentleman, child. He was an officer in the rebel army; when I ran out of ammunition and surrendered the hacienda to spare my family, he accorded me the full honours of war. He returned my revolver after removing the firing-pin. Then he proposed to me. I accepted because I felt it my duty to protect my younger sisters."

"That's a funny reason to marry someone. On the films people marry because they're in love."

"That wasn't the only reason why I married him," Spanish Grandmother said softly. "I was in love, too."

Conchita looked at her curiously: it was not often that the old lady spoke in that way. But there were still several pressing questions to be asked. "Grandmomma, did you have a son?"

"Yes, he was our only child. He was a gentleman, too."

"If he had Spanish blood and Filipino blood he would be a mestiza."

"Yes, child, that is what the indios would call him."

"Was my momma a mestiza?"

"She had no Spanish blood, she was nevertheless a lady."

"You're not telling me the truth, Grandmomma. Momma must have been an indio. And if I have so little Spanish blood, I'm an indio, too." Conchita's brown eyes filled with tears.

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The old lady lifted the olive-skinned child onto her lap.

" Now listen to me, Conchita. I know that sometimes I am a silly old woman, but names do not count. Always remember that. It is only people that count. How much Spanish blood you or your parents had does not matter: what matters is that they were very fine people and they died for these Philippine Islands, fighting the Japanese. If you grow up to be like them, you will be a fine person, too."

Conchita was only slightly mollified. " But, Grandmomma, if blood doesn't matter, why are you so proud of being Spanish? "

" An old woman must have something of which to boast. My shooting is one way of boasting, but I cannot shoot all the time so I boast about being Spanish. If I were young and pretty, as you will be when you are grown, I would not need to boast. But when you are a little older I will stop boasting about being Spanish, and boast of you instead."

" Oh dear," said Conchita, " I do hope I grow up to be something to boast about."

From that day on, Conchita never heard Spanish Grandmother use the term indio, save when speaking to Mariano; that was because Mariano would have been hurt had she abandoned her apparent hostility towards him, for then there would have been no excuse for the shooting-match. The old woman even began to use the term Filipino, though not of herself. In her own eyes, Spanish Grandmother would always remain a Spaniard.

When Conchita was nine she went to a convent school; the Mother Superior was an American. Conchita could read only Latin, her Bible and Missal being in that language; all the Spanish books had been burnt in the fighting of '98, and Spanish Grandmother did not encourage American or Tagalog literature, and English newspapers she detested, for many of them had been against Spain in '98.

Consequently, when the Mother Superior asked the little girl what she could do, Conchita replied, " I can make lace and I can shoot straight. My Grandmomma taught me."

The Mother Superior was deeply shocked. She told Conchita that these accomplishments were no longer required of a lady: the world, she explained in her earnest Bronx voice, had moved on since 1898.

When Conchita returned home, she faithfully repeated the conversation to Spanish Grandmother. Spanish Grandmother said the gringo nun didn't know what she was talking about.

So, simultaneously with her formal instruction, Conchita persevered with small-arms practice in the back garden; only now she had a companion, Leon, the constable's son. Leon was

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the elder by two years, and better able to take the recoil of the .45, but Conchita had inherited much of her grandmother's skill, so that they were very well matched.

When Conchita was fourteen, the old lady bought the girl her first full-length dress: it was a mestiza dress, with butterfly sleeves, stiff and oval with pineapple fibre. Conchita wore this dress for the party given by Mariano before his son went to the Military Academy at Malolos.

Conchita and Leon walked together in the garden, and there was a light breeze and the grasshoppers chirped. The breeze inflated the butterfly sleeves so that, in the shadow cast before her, Conchita resembled a minor angel. Leon was so overcome that he forgot the stern Spanish conventions and tried to steal a good-bye kiss.

Conchita slapped his face. They did not see each other again for four years.

By that time, Conchita had become a student of Tagalog literature at the University of Centro Escolar. It was there they met again, at a student ball.

Physically, Conchita took after her grandmother. She was tall for a Filipino—quite five foot five. She was dark, but smoothly so, not swarthy like Spanish Grandmother. Apart from her rather prominent cheekbones—they slanted suddenly and dramatically—Conchita might have been a European.

Leon had gained little in height and was no taller than herself; riding or some hereditary tendency had made him slightly bow-legged; but he made the most of his height, holding his broad shoulders very straight. Conchita thought he looked the perfect figure of a cavalry officer in his new uniform decorated with the bars of a second-lieutenant.

They danced together and then sat out and talked. Conchita asked him if he still shot with the pistol and Leon revealed that he had won the Academy's award for marksmanship. "I would like to shoot against lola abuela," he confided. "I am sure I would do better than my father."

"Since lola abuela is not here, why not shoot against me, unless you are too proud," said Conchita, casting down her eyelashes.

Leon was not too proud and the next day they met at the rifle range of an amusement park and Conchita beat him. They began to meet regularly at the range: it provided an excuse for their meetings. Then, quite soon, neither felt the need of an excuse, and the shooting-matches became less frequent. They even arranged that his first leave should coincide with her holiday.

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But when Conchita arrived back at the hacienda she found Manuel Ballesteros installed as an honoured guest. Don Manuel, as Spanish Grandmother insisted on addressing him despite his protests, was the old lady's last surviving relative in Spain. This made him Conchita's ninth cousin, Spanish Grandmother pointed out, which was well within the limits of consanguinity permitted by the Church.

Conchita said, " Yes, lola abuela," and cast down her long dark lashes. Beneath them, her high cheekbones stood out like bars of fire.

Don Manuel, she was interested to observe, also flushed in so far as his yellowish, scholarly complexion would allow. Then he embarked upon an ancient Andalusian proverb so complex that Conchita lost the thread before he had finished speaking. For Don Manuel was a scholar of some eminence in his native Barcelona. Spanish Grandmother said he would coach Conchita in Spanish literature so that she could finish her studies in Spain.

Conchita said, " Yes, lola abuela."

Leon, who had called to take Conchita out riding, said he had remembered a previous engagement. He went home and shot corn-cob tins off the back fence of the police post until his mother came out and told him to stop the noise. Then Leon amused himself by painting long yellow Spanish faces on the cans. He set up the painted cans and shot some more until his father came out and asked him who was paying for the ammunition anyway?

So Leon stopped shooting and walked back to the hacienda. This time he did not go to the front door but looked cautiously over the fence.

Conchita was walking in the garden, gravely studying a copy of the complete works of Lope de Vega in the original Spanish. She looked very beautiful and not very scholarly; she spotted Leon at once.

" Are you offering yourself for target practice? " she asked.

" I might just as well do," said Leon sulkily.

" Is there something the matter? " asked Conchita.

" Of course, there is a great deal the matter."

" How would I know that? " Conchita asked innocently.

" You know I love you," said Leon.

" Do I? "

" I told you so in Manila that day at the shooting-range when I beat you by an inner to a magpie. Don't you remember? "

" I seem to remember beating you by a bull to a magpie," said Conchita. Leon seemed about to protest, but checked himself.

" Never mind what you beat me by. I told you I loved you."

" So you did," said Conchita. " Well, if you still love me,

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why don't you go and tell lola abuela instead of skulking behind that fence like a corn-cob tin. I believe you're afraid of her."

"I am afraid of her."

"Don Manuel isn't afraid of her."

"That's because he is a Spaniard and she respects Spaniards."

"And so old," said Conchita. "At least thirty."

"I can't wait until I'm that age before I ask lola abuela's permission to marry you," said Leon.

"You must do something to make her respect you."

"Yes, but what?"

"Outshoot her, Leon."

"You mean that if I can't outshoot her I can't marry you?"

"Surely you will do a little thing like that for me?"

"Sure I can," he said. "It's just that a fellow has his off days."

"How are you feeling today?"

"Fine since we had this talk," said Leon incautiously.

"Then come round this evening," said Conchita. "About eight. She always shoots in the evenings about eight."

José the butler was scrubbing the verandah steps while this conversation was taking place. Neither Conchita nor Leon noticed him because they were used to seeing him there. José went indoors to Spanish Grandmother. The old lady told José she never listened to servants' gossip and then gave him certain instructions . . .

At eight o'clock the fusillade from the verandah began. Don Manuel and Conchita were also on the verandah. Don Manuel was engaged in a monologue on Lope de Vega, but he found the shooting disturbing. He suggested to Conchita that they should go indoors; she refused on the grounds that they were unchaperoned. Don Manuel talked on but he had met his match in the revolver of Spanish Grandmother. It spat flame into the growing dusk and made conversation impossible.

The corn-cob tins were tinkling merrily.

At five past eight Leon marched straight up the steps of the verandah to where Spanish Grandmother was sitting. He was in full uniform and formally saluted all three of them. Then he turned to Spanish Grandmother and said, "Excuse me, lola abuela, but that gun is shooting high right. As I was passing, a bullet went over my head."

Spanish Grandmother ground a cheroot stub under her heel; somewhere in the garden José sighed. She said, "The last man who walked up those steps in such a uniform I shot."

"Forgive me, lola abuela," said Leon, "but I think you are mistaken. The last man who came up these steps in such a uniform you married."

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" So you would call an old woman a liar to her face," shouted Spanish Grandmother. " We shall soon see whose hand is the steadiest. Set the tins up, Conchita."

Conchita set up the tins with beating heart; even Don Manuel stopped talking to watch.

Conchita returned and Leon invited Spanish Grandmother to fire first. The old lady bit off the end of a new cheroot and held it unlit between her lips as she fanned the hammer of her Colt, holding it waist-high. Six shots were expended in as many seconds and the wall was cleared of tins.

Leon fired next, using his own Service revolver, and he too cleared the wall of tins.

" Not bad, young man," said Spanish Grandmother. " You are not so fast as your father, but perhaps your aim is truer."

" It is because I aim high that I shoot straight," said Leon.

" I know it well," said Spanish Grandmother. " But before you speak to me of your aims there is more shooting to be done. Set up the matches on the wall, Conchita."

Conchita set up the matches on the tops of white wands that the gardener used for tying up plants. It was almost dark now, but the wands were clearly visible, though the positions of the match-heads, where they protruded above the wood, was a matter for guesswork. There were six wands on the wall.

Spanish Grandmother fired first: four matches flared in the dusk and two wands were snapped off in mid stem. It was good shooting by any standards—save those of Spanish Grandmother.

Leon followed, firing slowly and with great care. One, two, three matches flared in the dusk. Then a fourth. The next shot missed, the bullet singing high over the wall. He fired at the last wand and the watchers on the verandah thought he had missed again, but suddenly the last wand flared in a comforting glow. Five out of six.

Leon was a generous winner—so generous that for the moment he forgot the purpose of the contest. " I have beaten you by a fluke, lola abuela," he said. " Would you care to fire again? "

Conchita sighed and Spanish Grandmother said, " Set up the matches again." Conchita set them up.

This time Spanish Grandmother ignited five of the six matches and Conchita set up six new ones for Leon. Sweat stood out on the young officer's forehead and beaded the wispy moustache he had grown to go with his uniform.

In the darkness five matches flared.

The tension was enormous as Leon raised his pistol for the last shot: even Don Manuel forgot Lope de Vega. Leon fired and there was an orange spurt from the muzzle of his gun, but no

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answering spurt from the wall. "Missed," he said, almost crying with disappointment. Then, unbelievably, flame spurted from the head of the last wand.

"The bullet must have grazed the head and it took a little time to ignite," said Spanish Grandmother. "Young man, you have beaten me at my own game. You are one I would not be ashamed to have in my family."

"Oh lola abuela," said Conchita, lapsing into Spanish, "there is no one like thee." She kissed her grandmother fondly.

"I believe that is true," said the old lady, "for I am very rare."

A shadow passed over Leon's happiness. "Don Manuel has not fired," he said.

"I am no marksman," said Don Manuel. "I strongly disapprove of firearms and would not have one in my house."

"As you told me this afternoon," said Spanish Grandmother. "But why not try your hand?"

"Well, since I have never fired before . . ."

"Take my revolver," offered Leon.

"How does it work?" asked Don Manuel.

"Like this," said Leon, showing him.

Don Manuel stood on the verandah, holding the big pistol with both hands. Suddenly Conchita cried, "Open your eyes, Don Manuel, or you won't be able to aim." But at that moment the pistol spoke and they heard the bullet winging its way high into the night.

Upon the wall at the end of the garden a match flared into life.

"How did that happen?" demanded Leon. "All the matches are dead."

Spanish Grandmother stared them all down and said, "It was no match. A glow-worm, perhaps."

Then, turning to Conchita, "Child, go with your novio, or fiancé as the gringos call it, and find José. Tell him to bring us coffee and brandy with which to celebrate Leon's success. And tell José this," she added, raising her voice. "He is fired. He is filthy and lazy and insubordinate. Also, he has been eating garlic, which is the one Spanish custom I cannot bear."

"I can smell it from here, lola abuela," said Conchita. "That is how I knew you had him hidden in the garden so that you could cheat against yourself."

But Conchita spoke so quietly that no one else could hear.

★ ★ ★

MINOR LATCHKEY

PERSONAL ADVT: Minipiano and ministudent seek miniflat. Maxiurgent. Box xxx.

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A DAY TO REMEMBER

" Gosh, Bert," the boy said
" it sure has been fun "

BY BARBARA TURNER

THE shabby old man and the ragged boy with the bamboo rod saw the coin, a half-dollar, on the pavement simultaneously. The old man stepped out and covered it with the hole in his shoe, and caught not only the coin, but the boy's eager fingers as well.

" Cripes! " the boy said, but he didn't remove his fingers. He was naked to the waist and clad in ragged dungarees, his dirty, bare feet tough as leather. His thatch of brownish hair hadn't been cut for some time. " It ain't yourn, is it? " he said, his bright blue eyes glaring up into the old, watery blue ones under fierce white brows.

" 'Tis now," the old man said. " Beat it, sonny."

" I seen it first," the boy said stubbornly. He looked undecided, but still didn't remove his fingers. The old man stepped a little harder, and saw the boy grimace.

" Go on," he said. " Beat it. Go on to your fishin'."

" I ain't goin' fishin'," the boy said.

" What ya got the rod for, then? " The old man thought. If he'd go, I could git me a beer and a sandwich. He hadn't eaten since yesterday morning.

" Givin' 'em away down 't the opening of the new store," the boy said.

" Oh? " the old man said slyly. A rod like that would get you a dollar. " Givin' 'em to *anyone*? "

" Kids," the boy said.

Then his face brightened speculatively. " Let me have the money," he said, " an' I'll git you one."

" Ha," the old man said, " what'd I want a rod for? "

" Sell it," the boy said. He was no fool.

" They wouldn't give you a second one," the old man said.

" I'll leave this rod with you," the boy said. " There's a crowd. They won't remember."

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" Well," the old man said, " tell you what. You do that an' I'll halve the money."

The boy didn't want to make that bargain. He wanted all the money. He was a hard one. But the old man glared a little fiercer, and finally the boy said, " Well, O.K. Get it changed."

" I'll keep it until you get back to see you do," the old man said. The boy looked uncertain. " Here. Hand over the rod," the old man said. The boy hesitated.

" Well, for Pete's sake," the old man said angrily, " you don't think I'm goin' t' swipe it, do you? "

The boy handed it over, and trotted up the street.

The old man grinned wickedly, and spat from between his yellow teeth like those of an ancient horse. He would soon have two rods worth a dollar each, and half a dollar besides if he was smart.

He'd about decided the boy wasn't coming back, though, when he saw him, the rod over his shoulder cutting a swathe, like a scythe, through the crowd.

He was panting. " There," he said, " they weren't no wiser. I got some apples they was givin' away, too." He handed one to the old man.

" Why, thank you, sonny," he said in surprise, and bit into the apple as best he could with what teeth he had. It was crisp and sweet and juicy. He sucked the piece happily, felt the saliva come to the corners of his mouth, and wiped them on the ragged sleeve of his coat.

" Well, now, sonny," he said, feeling suddenly amiable, " where *do* you fish when you're fishin'? "

He remembered a farm pond he had stood by yesterday waiting for a lift. A handmade sign said: *Fishing 50 cents. Children with adults free.* An old negro sat in the little shack by the gate. The pond, part of a river, looked pretty small stuff to the old man, who had been around and seen salmon caught in New Brunswick, and trout in Ontario, and tarpon in Florida, and even marlin in Cuba. But the negro told him it was good fishing, with plenty of bass and perch.

" Ain't never been fishin'," the boy said, astonishing the old man.

As a boy he had fished a lot in the stream on the farm. Sometimes even now he dreamt of the farm, and his mother in her blue dress, the lamp on the kitchen table, and the lowing of cattle. And sometimes, too, of Pa with the leather strap, and the feel of its sting on his breeches.

The strap was why he'd left home at fourteen. He'd learnt a lot in his life: ships, lumbering, cooking, worked as a guide on

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fishing-trips, and groom in a racing-stable. Learnt about cards and liquor, and women, too. Especially Angel, damn her. He'd boarded out the kids, the boy and the girl, after she ran off with the salesman. Once in a while, at first, he'd gone to see the kids. But not for long. They was ashamed of him, damn it.

"So you ain't never been fishin', Johnny?" he said.

The boy looked surprised. "How'd you know my name was Johnny?" he said. The old man was surprised, too. Johnny had been the name of his own boy, probably grown up now.

"All boys is named Johnny," he said.

The boy was puzzled, but all he said was, "What's your name?"

"Bert," the old man said, biting off another hunk of apple with effort. "Didn't you ever want to go fishin'?"

"Never thought about it," the boy said.

"Well," the old man said, "what do you do?"

"Shop-lift," the boy said, "and sometimes run stuff for Al."

"Who's Al?" the old man asked sharply.

"He's the head of the gang. He's fifteen," the boy said proudly. "Sometimes they even pinch a car."

"Hey," the old man said, "how old are you, anyhow? You ain't in on that now, are you?"

"I'm almost twelve," the boy said, "and it's a quick way to make money. Al says I'm too young yet. But when I'm older . . ."

"Look here, Johnny," the old man said, "ain't you got no folks?"

"No," the boy said, "I ain't. Never had a pa, and my ma left me with Aunt Hilda. She works in the Elite Café when she's sober."

The old man chewed a little harder and faster on his apple and it hurt his sore old gums. "How'd you like to go fishin'?" he asked suddenly.

The boy thought about it awhile. "O.K.," he said finally.

The old man weighed the fifty-cent coin thoughtfully. "Don't suppose you got any money?"

"No, I ain't," the boy said, angry. "An' you owe me a quarter!"

"Well," the old man said, dropping the money in his pocket, "if you want to fish, you got to chip that in on expenses."

The boy looked doubtful. "All right," he said finally, reluctantly.

They tramped the dusty pavements to the edge of town, the boy sullen, waiting to be shown. Out where the houses thinned to occasional huts they got a lift in the back of a rickety van.

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The boy still didn't say anything. He was watching the rolling green fields, and the thick-topped green trees, the little houses tucked under them for shade, and the brown and black and white dottings of cattle.

"Ain't you never been in the country before?" the old man asked him.

He looked a little scornful. "Course I have," he said. "One night Al let me drive out with him to a road-house."

They got down at the gate. The old man paid the negro, and they went through the pasture towards the pond. On either side there were cows that looked at them thoughtfully, lifting their heads as they chewed.

"They're sort of big," the boy said, edging a little nearer the man.

"When I was your age," the old man said, "I used to milk twenty of 'em."

He picked up a rusty tin. Now he'd gone and spent the money like a sentimental old fool, he supposed they might as well fish. "We'll dig for some worms," he said.

They dug with an old board, and when the tin was half full, the old man said he thought that would do. They went down to the pond and found a rickety, little flat-ended boat, and an old paddle whittled crudely from a board. It was half full of water, and the old man set the boy to bailing, while he spliced the rope on the bow to a rock wound with wire for an anchor.

The old man pushed them out, and the boy sat gingerly in the centre of his seat and watched the muddy water slide by. The water slid out behind them as the old man paddled, and the little waves rocked the boat gently. The shore seemed a long way away. It kept getting farther and farther, and there was nothing but the great platter of water around them, and the gentle slosh of it against the sides of the boat.

"Gosh!" the boy said, and looked at the old man, who was gazing ahead, pretending not to notice him. "Gosh! Just like the ocean!"

He had been coerced into reading about that. He didn't really mind school when he couldn't dodge the attendance officer. He could learn the stuff easily enough, and go on thinking what he wanted to be thinking.

The old man looked down at him then and grinned, his long yellow teeth showing. "Just like the ocean," he said, and he thought of the choppy, wild Atlantic all around as far as you could see, and the smooth, glassy, oily calm of the vast Pacific. He looked at the quarter mile of pond, at the fields, and the little patch of woods a couple of hundred yards away across the pond.

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" Johnny," he said, " some day you'll see the ocean, and when you do I bet you remember today. I hope you do."

" Gosh," the boy said. " I won't never see no ocean. How far is it, anyway? "

" Not so far," the old man said. " Sure you'll see it." He could see the boy begin to speculate about that, but then there was too much going on right here, and he stopped thinking of the other. He was beginning to relax and take it more easy. The old man guessed he'd begun to realize the old tub wasn't going to sink after all.

" You know how to swim? " the old man asked suddenly.

" No," the boy said. " How would I? "

" Don't they have a boys' club or a Y.M.C.A. or Boy Scouts in your town? " he asked. " They teach swimming."

" Gosh," the boy said, " I don't know."

" Well," the old man said, " when you get back you look 'em up. If you're going to see the ocean some day and if you're goin' to fish, you ought to know how to swim."

" Yes," the boy said, but he wasn't listening. He was watching the fascination of the shore so far away, feeling the strangeness of actually being suspended on water, watching the cows grazing unconcerned, the fences running into the bushes, and the big, inverted cup of the sky which you could see all the way down to the rolling green fields.

The old man shipped the paddle, and let down the stone that served as anchor. He began to unwind the line round his rod, and the boy watched him, and then, without being told, began to unwind his own. The old man showed him how to put on the worm. The boy dropped the first one, and then pricked his fingers and swore. After a while he got the twisting, slippery thing on, and looked up, and grinned.

" Good," the old man said. " Now watch." He gave a heave and the line and float flew out and settled on the water. The boy tried, and got the line tangled round the old man, who just managed to dodge the hook.

" Gosh," the boy said, and tried again, and didn't do any better. " I give up," he said. The old man wanted to laugh, but he didn't.

" Try again, Johnny," he said patiently. " After a while it will come. Just like learning anything."

The boy got it out finally and hunched forward expectantly, awaiting the fish. The old man settled back comfortably, but then he thought, what if they ain't biting? The boy won't think much of fishing then. His sceptical attitude had galled the old man. Besides, he was hungry, and thought some fish cooked over

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in that grove would taste good. But if they didn't get any fish, there was a whole half-dollar wasted; he must be getting to be a doddering old fool.

He did hope the boy would get some bites, though. That was the excitement of fishing, feeling those sudden, unexpected tugs, warnings from way below that you weren't alone, that there was something alive down there ready to challenge you.

The waiting went on for quite a while, and sometimes they would pull in their lines, and move the float and look at the bait. The old man, who had taken off his rusty black coat and rolled up the sleeves of his dingy shirt, would have been happy to sit there in the sun and doze, and watch the cattle and cloud shadows on the fields, and remember. But because of the boy, he couldn't. It suddenly seemed important that he should like it, too.

After a while, the old man said, " Well, they don't seem to be doing much here. Let's move. Here, you help with the anchor."

The new spot was a little nearer the shore, and they hadn't had the lines out ten minutes before the old man got a bite. He didn't hook it, and he wished he had, so that at least the boy could see a fish landed—and he wanted to eat too. He was sorry it hadn't been the boy's line, though.

Then the boy gave a jump, and a tug, and his eyes were wide. " I had one! " he yelled, " I felt him! "

The old man knew he'd pulled too soon, and told him. But he was happy: at least the boy knew the feel of a fish on the line. The old man got a perch then, and the boy was excited, examining it closely as it flopped about in the boat.

" Gosh! " he said. " Just look at 'im! "

Then he got another tug, and the old man saw it, and told him to wait, and after several jerks he said, " Now! "

The boy heaved, and then the weight was on the line, and it came alive and pulsed up the slender rod to the boy's hands. To the old man's surprise, by the bend of the rod, he saw it was a good one.

" Let him have some line if he wants to run," he said quickly, showing the boy. " But never let him get any slack." The fish broke water thirty feet away, and the old man saw with an unaccustomed leaping of his old heart, that it was a bass, and a fighter.

" Take it easy, now," he warned and settled down to coaching, hoping with an urgency he hadn't known for a long time that the boy wouldn't lose it.

The battle went on and on, the boy tense, his tongue so hard between his teeth the old man wondered he didn't bite it off. The bass jumped, and ran, and came deceptively easily, and then broke,

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and ran, and jumped again. Then at last it came up out of the muddy depths, swimming slowly, rolling on its side in weariness. The old man reached over carefully, ignoring the spines, and managed to get his crooked old fingers in the gills, and lift it into the boat.

When he looked up from taking the hook out and saw the boy's eyes, he didn't have to worry if they didn't get another bite all day. The old man had hooked a fisherman, and landed him safely!

For an hour and a half they were busy. When the fish stopped biting so fast, the old man said, " Let's go ashore and cook these." He let the boy paddle awkwardly to the grove.

He had his pocket-knife and showed the boy how to clean and skin them, hoping nobody at the farm would say anything about the smoke from the fire. They munched the crisp, sweet flakiness of the fish hungrily, and when they were full, they stretched out on the grass in the sun and watched the clouds high above the trees, and the old man's eyes closed.

When he awoke the boy was sitting looking at him. " Can we fish some more, Bert? " he asked eagerly.

" Sure," the old man said, getting up with a sigh, feeling his rheumatics.

" You know, Bert," the boy said, as they sat dreamily watching their lines, " this is the most fun I ever had. I wish I could do it again."

" Why can't you? " the old man said.

" Costs money."

" Not much. You could get yourself a paper round or something and earn some."

The man saw the boy had never thought of this before. " Heck," he said, " I don't know. The gang think that sort of thing's soppy. I expect I could work more for Al."

Suddenly the old man was angry. " Look here, you," he bellowed, " you leave that Al alone! That's no *good*! If you want to earn some money, go after it *honest*. I didn't bring you out here to get you running round more with this Al. If you want to come fishin', you get a job, and earn the money. You hear? "

The boy looked surprised and cowed by this outburst of anger. He didn't say much after that, and the old man thought, You can't tell kids nothing. They gotta learn. He'd had to learn himself, and he was sorry. If he'd stayed on the farm, it would now be his, and he'd have a wife and family, and a pillow of his own. A pillow to lay his head on was something he'd been hankering for lately.

They fished until dark and got a ride back on a cattle truck.

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The driver said the old man could go all the way with him if he wanted. The old man hesitated a moment. But it was a hundred miles on his way, and what good would it do to stay here?

"Well, Johnny," he said when the truck pulled up at a red light, and the boy got out with his fish and rods, "it's been nice to 've met you. Thanks for goin' fishin' with me. It's a day I won't forget."

"Gosh, me neither, Bert!" the boy said. "It sure has been fun!"

He shook the boy's hand, man to man. "'Bye, son," he said, "and keep out of trouble."

"You bet," the boy said with surprising earnestness. "I'm goin' to git me a paper round, like you said, Bert. An' I'm goin' to learn to swim too, so's I can fish."

"Good boy," the old man said as the truck ground into gear, leaving the boy standing under the street light.

The old man leaned his head against the back of the seat and closed his eyes. He couldn't remember when he'd got so much for half a dollar. He saw the coin lying on the pavement, he reached out and covered it with his shoe. It changed into a pillow, and he laid his weary old head on its soft comfort, and slept.

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BLUE MOON

Oxford or Cambridge, bluejacket or bluestocking, if you find our quiz a stony woad to hoe, don't be forlorn, sure azure born the answers are on page 83.

1. *Who perpetrated: a. The Blue Lagoon; b. The Blue Danube; c. The Blue Boy; d. The Blue Bird*
2. *Is there such a thing as: Blue Chartreuse; Blue Pimpernel; Blue Roses; a Blue-faced Booby*
3. *"The blue, the fresh, the ever free!"*
   Who wrote this line of poesie? (It wasn't Tennyson)
4. *What are: Danish Blue; Blue Ruin?*
5. *"Just a wearyin' for you—*
   All the time a-feelin' blue."
   Who said that? And while we're on the subject of blues, who wrote Rhapsody in Blue and the Blue Tango?
6. *The Bluebells of Scotland—what are they?*
7. *Where is the Blue Grass State?*

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FORMULA FOR LOVE

He was a diffident and nervous young man

BY KEM BENNETT

RUMBLING internally as a result of having bolted his lunch, James Henry Lightbody loped along the corridors of the Virisan plant like a nervous giraffe, making for his office. As he had hoped he would, he found it empty; Margaret Kendall, with whom he shared it, had not yet returned from the canteen.

He sat down at his desk, pulling the typewriter towards him. From an inside pocket in his sports coat he took two dog-eared pieces of paper. The first was an interdepartmental circular from the Appointments Office of Virisan Ltd., his employer, one of Britain's large drug-manufacturing firms. It invited applications for the post of Field Research Officer, Grade 2, rate of emolument £2,000 per annum rising by increments to £2,678, and went on to explain that it was proposed to send a Field Research Officer, Grade 2, to Mexico in the near future in order to carry out ab initio research on the pharmacological properties of certain species of cactus. It listed a formidable number of qualifications required, but finished temptingly with the information that, apart from the salary, the successful applicant would receive a cost-of-living subsidy to be later agreed.

The second piece of paper that James Henry had taken from his pocket was a used envelope on the back of which he had that morning, in the privacy of the Men's Room, composed with infinite pains a letter of application for the job described on the first piece of paper.

Now, with long, nervous fingers, and resisting a constant temptation to glance over his shoulder, James Henry tapped out a fair copy of the letter. As soon as it was done, without giving himself time to think, he popped it into an envelope and loped out into the corridor, where he flung the application as if it were red-hot into one of the chutes provided for interdepartmental correspondence.

There! It was done! The die was cast, James Henry told

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himself, as a feeling of nausea swept over him, abetted by a sharp twinge of indigestion. With hunched shoulders he returned to his office to bite his nails. The cold sweat on his forehead and the pulses beating insistently in the soles of his feet reminded him of a ghastly time at school when he had been tormented into writing to a famous car firm to ask for a demonstration of their latest model . . .

James Henry was a diffident and nervous young man.

He was very tall, with round blue eyes as guileless as nursery wallpaper, an untidy mop of fair hair, bony, long-fingered, acid-stained hands with the fingernails disgracefully bitten, and a permanently apologetic expression.

The nausea faded, ebbing reluctantly like a tide on a steep beach. It left a deposit of indigestion behind, however, and presently James Henry rose from his chair and went to take a couple of " Burpies " from a large bottle in a cabinet by the window. Burpies was the newly devised trade name for Virisan's old and tried indigestion remedy and, with its frank realism and up-to-date facing of the facts, provided an example of the go-ahead attitude of the great firm.

The Burpies lived up to their advertising. Feeling better, James Henry composed himself, laid off his fingernails for a bit, and told himself that he had not, after all, committed a crime. Of course, there wasn't a hope that he'd get the job, but it was worth a try . . .

He was taking masochistic comfort in the conviction that he need not worry, he would never be raised to the heights of Field Research Officer, Grade 2, when Margaret Kendall came back from lunch. She was a tall dark, handsome girl, an Honours graduate in Biochemistry from Newnham College, Cambridge, and the owner of a mind as keen as a hollow-ground scalpel.

" Hullo," James Henry said.

" I shall get on with centrifuging those samples of BZ nine-eighty-five," Margaret Kendall briskly answered. " What are you going to do? "

" Help? " James Henry suggested with diffidence. " That is, if you want me to."

" Naturally," Margaret Kendall said, slipping a starched white coat over her immaculate grey-and-scarlet suit, while James Henry loped through into the laboratory to prepare the centrifuge, feeling humble.

For Virisan's Research Group D, which consisted of James Henry, Margaret, and their leader and Head, Dr. Robert McCulloch, M.Sc., Ph.D., the next few days went unexcitingly

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by while they laboured together through one of the periods of monotonous routine, which fill the greater part of research chemists' lives.

Then, on a fine May morning which happened to be a Monday, Robert McCulloch came into the laboratory carrying a sheaf of reports, a sample bottle filled with dove-grey powder, and an expression of mild intellectual curiosity. James Henry watched his boss with guilty apprehension; which was quite usual because, although he had nothing to feel guilty about, Dr. McCulloch frightened the wits out of him and that was the way it was.

"Good morning," McCulloch said in his crisply matter-of-fact voice. "Here's our old friend, BZ nine-eighty-two, back from Pets' Corner. The reports are thoroughly satisfactory, if not specially informative. They tried it on mice, rats, guinea-pigs, dogs, and monkeys, and in no case did any of the beasts show adverse effects. In fact, they all showed increased activity and well-being. It says that the monkey found its way through a maze of trapdoors to a banana in thirty-three seconds less than the norm for its breed. Encouraging, eh?"

"Yes, Dr. McCulloch," Margaret Kendall acknowledged coolly. She was not frightened of him, but she didn't like him any more than James Henry did.

As for James Henry, he nodded and mumbled something under his breath—without enthusiasm, because he knew by now what Dr. McCulloch was leading up to. A test.

In the past, James Henry had suffered from these tests. There had been the synthetic alkaloid built up from a vanillic base, which had turned out to be the grandfather of Mickey Finn himself and had knocked him as cold as a fish's stomach for twenty-two hours.

After that there had been a preparation destined for infants' teething powders which had brought him out in purple spots; a cure for gout which had given him a headache; and a cure for headaches which had caused him to drive over a policeman's foot on his way home from work. He had the right, of course, to refuse to make the tests—which were slightly unofficial, anyway—but the thought of Dr. McCulloch's sardonic contempt had always restrained him from exercising it.

"If you're agreeable, both of you," McCulloch was saying, "we'll make you up a couple of five-milligram doses and I'll stand by with a notebook to watch results. O.K.?"

"Of course," Margaret Kendall said. "Shall we take it orally?"

"Yes, for a start. Is this all right by you, Lightbody?"

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"Er . . . yes, Dr. McCulloch."

Five minutes later, first James Henry and then Margaret Kendall downed their doses of BZ nine-eighty-two, which tasted abominably bitter, with draughts of water out of a beaker smelling of carbon disulphide. Robert McCulloch set the stop-clock going and sat down, notebook on knee. Margaret Kendall went back to the trituration she had been working on. James Henry tucked himself away in the far corner of the laboratory with a textbook and tried not to be observed while biting his nails.

The stop-clock ticked noisily. Dr. McCulloch sat quite still, as alert and self-confident as a Wimbledon champion booked to play in a charity match against all comers at the Little Hog-slaughter Tennis Club. He was a dark man of middle height, with wavy black hair greying at the temples, a strong cleft chin, and an arrogantly decisive personality. He disapproved of Margaret Kendall, not because her work was unsatisfactory, but because he had decided early in life that women made unreliable scientists. He despised James Henry for being highly qualified and yet humble, tongue-tied, diffident, and apologetic.

A quarter of an hour later, James Henry stopped biting his nails. He looked with mild interest at his hands and made a mental note to put an end to the habit, once and for all. It was unsightly, unhygienic, and undignified; he couldn't imagine what compelled him to do it. Then he closed his textbook with a precise movement and laid it aside. He rose to his feet. He walked, holding himself erect, across the floor of the laboratory and, when he was within speaking distance, said quietly to Dr. McCulloch, "I can feel a distinct increase in well-being."

"Can you, now?" said McCulloch, cocking a jet-black eyebrow.

James Henry met his eyes, smiled, and nodded.

Margaret Kendall left her trituration. "I feel an increased confidence, too, Dr. McCulloch," she said. "I was a little depressed when we started the test, but it has gone now."

Robert McCulloch scribbled in his notebook. He looked up. "Let's do blood-pressures, shall we?"

James Henry watched interestedly while McCulloch wound the bandage of the sphygmomanometer round his upper arm. His thoughts were marshalled. He noted with pleasure the brilliant metallic shine of the mercury in the instrument and, at the same time, reflected that old McCulloch wasn't such a bad stick, after all. Brainy, a little arrogant perhaps, inclined to be intolerant of weakness and therefore to bully, but perfectly manageable so long as one stood up for oneself.

McCulloch was a human being, in fact, a member of the great

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family of humanity . . . . Ah, humanity! The nobility, the contradictions, the stupidities, the cruelties, the courage, the aspiration, the splendour: it was truly wonderful to be a member of such a family. Here he was, privileged to work for a great organization—commercially founded, certainly, but with humanity's welfare as its higher aim—in company with scientists of the calibre of Robert McCulloch and Margaret Kendall. He was a lucky fellow, he decided.

"Blood-pressure's all right," Dr. McCulloch grunted. "Now you, Miss Kendall."

James Henry stepped aside to make way for Margaret Kendall. She had taken off her laboratory coat and was rolling up the sleeve of her yellow cashmere sweater. She moved forward to the sphygmomanometer and James Henry noted with delight the young resilience of her stride. He admired her long, slim legs, her small, neat torso, the high, rounded breasts under the softness of her sweater, her neck, the carriage of her head, the dark hair softly curling about her shapely ears, her fine eyes . . .

She looked up, turned her head, met his eyes. She smiled. James Henry felt his heart leap in his chest. Such tenderness! Never before had he realized that Margaret's smile was so warm, so gay, so intelligently adorable. He smiled back, his eyes filled with loving laughter. For several moments that seemed to last for an eternity they held each other's gaze. Then the telephone rang.

"Damn!" said Robert McCulloch a few seconds later. "It's Sir David. He needs me for a meeting. Can I trust you two to remain sufficiently objective to make intelligent notes?"

"I think so, R.M.," James Henry answered, in a voice that inferred the question had hardly been justified.

"Right," Dr. McCulloch said. "I'll be back in an hour."

He went. The laboratory door, made of expensive Australian hardwood, clunked softly shut behind him.

"Margaret," James Henry said.

"Jim!" Her deep voice was husky, querying.

"Please come here."

She came, half smiling, half frowning. "It's BZ nine-eighty-two, Jim," she said. "Isn't it?"

"I don't know, Margaret," James Henry said. "Does it matter?"

He took her in his arms. Their mouths met. James Henry felt his heart beating. He felt Margaret's beating, too. A two-bar, five-kilowatt electric fire of love glowed in his chest and he ran his fingers passionately through her hair. "Arrh," he said. "Margaret, Margaret, Margaret!"

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Then the telephone rang again.

Reluctantly, magnetized by love, James Henry and Margaret tore themselves apart. James Henry reached for the phone. "Hullo? Lightbody, Group D, here." His voice was calm and masterful.

"This is the Appointments Office," the answering voice said. "Mr. Dingle's secretary. Mr. Dingle wanted to know if you could spare him a few minutes of your time, Mr. Lightbody."

James Henry hesitated, thought, decided, shrugged. "Of course. I'll be right over." He hung up. He turned to Margaret. "Dingle of Appointments wants to see me, darling. I expect they're going to give me that Mexican job. I won't be long." He took her chin in his two hands, tilted the lovely oval of her face, and kissed her gently on the lips. Then he said, "Au revoir, ma rose," lightly, caressingly, and went.

It took James Henry a matter of five minutes to walk through the labyrinthine corridors of the Virisan plant to the wing that housed the Appointments Office. On arrival he was shown straight into Mr. Dingle's office, where he sat down uninvited, after having helped himself to a cigarette from the box on the desk. Mr. Dingle, a gross, bald-headed man with small, bright eyes, watched him shrewdly. Silence.

Unconcerned, James Henry lit his cigarette and crossed his legs. Presently he became tired of the pregnant silence—so obvious a manœuvre on the part of a Director of Appointments—and he said, "I take it, Mr. Dingle, that you have asked me here in order to discuss the Mexican appointment?"

Mr. Dingle admitted that this was correct.

James Henry nodded. He then proceeded to point out to Dingle how extraordinarily fortunate it was that he, James Henry Lightbody, had in his adolescence been a collector of cacti. He did not mention that his collection had been limited to one small, sad button of a plant that shed its spikes and died after no more than ten days in the humidity of his father's greenhouse.

Mr. Dingle made a few notes.

James Henry then went on to observe that for a field job in Mexico the firm would be foolish to appoint some weakling of an egghead, and that what they wanted was a scientist tough in body to cope with the physical hardships of the desert and tough in mind to deal with the notoriously idle and dishonest Mexican peons. He then mentioned his membership of the Virisan Harriers and the fact that he had won last year's steeplechase for the Founder's Cup by several hundreds of yards. He forbore

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from citing evidence of his mental aptitude for the job in case Mr. Dingle should think him boastful, but he let the inference lie where he had dropped it, and delicately changed the subject.

Presently Mr. Dingle mentioned Spanish.

James Henry inclined his head solemnly. He already had a smattering of the language, he told Mr. Dingle—which was true because he had read Hemingway and other bullfighting authors extensively, and could hardly have failed to remember some of the more commonly repeated phrases—and then added, "Of course, it's a frightfully easy language. I doubt if it'll take me a month to master it. Needs must when the devil drives, no es verdad?" and from that moment, although he didn't know it, he was in. Ebenezer Dingle knew the value to industry of the self-confident, buccaneering type of man and here, he was convinced, he had found one.

With his spirits soaring higher and even higher, James Henry went back to his laboratory—and to Margaret.

Furthermore, it so happened that Dr. McCulloch did not return from his interview with the managing director in an hour. Something special had turned up. While James Henry was dazzling Mr. Dingle, Robert McCulloch was sharing the back seat of his boss's limousine, bound for London and a conference at the Ministry of Supply.

Great matters kept Dr. McCulloch occupied for three days in London. On the fourth day he appeared at the plant as usual, and at half past ten in the morning strode into Research Group D's laboratory in a saturnine good humour. Outwardly, he found nothing changed; his assistants were hard at work and a set of typewritten notes on the BZ-nine-eighty-two test were waiting for him on his desk. He picked them up and started to read them through, at the same time moving out of his office back into the laboratory. "Increased self-confidence, euphoria, heightened perception, quick action, eighteen-hour duration, no side- or after-effects," he read aloud. "Good lord, how very interesting! Were there really no side-effects at all—no headache, no spots before the eyes, no depressive reaction?"

James Henry glanced at Margaret. There had been side-effects, as it were, but they had agreed that they were none of Robert McCulloch's business. "No, sir," he said, "the drug seems to be completely inoffensive."

Dr. McCulloch looked at him. He glanced at Miss Kendall and observed in a clinical sort of way that she was looking radiant. "Hmm," he said, brows knitted. "In that case we'd better let the doctors have it for clinical testing straight away. It looks as if it might be big. Are you two still on BZ nine-eighty-five?"

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"Yes, Dr. McCulloch," Margaret said.

"Then you had better drop it. Start right in on a fabricating layout in glass for BZ nine-eighty-two and as soon as we have a few pounds of the stuff we'll bung it out to the hospitals." He strode towards his office door, and then paused, and turned on the threshold. "Well done, you two," he said. "If something comes of this you'll get your share of the credit." The door shut behind him.

James Henry squeezed Margaret's hand. "Group A got a two-thousand-pound bonus for developing Bombadil 372," he said. "There's a dear little house in Welwyn going for four thousand."

"If we could get a seventy-five-per-cent mortgage," Margaret said, "we'd have a thousand left over to furnish with. Oh Jim darling, how wonderful!" They were moving into a clinch when the noise of Dr. McCulloch's door opening stopped them.

McCulloch stood in the doorway with an inter-office memorandum in his hand. "What on earth's all this?" he demanded. "You, Lightbody—going to Mexico as a Field Research Officer. Can I believe my eyes?"

James Henry blinked and swallowed. After the effects of the dose of BZ nine-eighty-two had worn off, he had remembered his interview with Mr. Dingle with nothing less than cringing embarrassment. It had seemed to him that he must have utterly spoilt his chances with such a display of bombast and self-opinionated assurance. He had evidently been wrong. "Yes, sir," he said. "That is, I hadn't heard, but . . . but I did apply and I did have an interview."

"Good lord!" McCulloch said, rather offensively. "Do you actually want to go?"

"I—I—"

"Yes." Margaret's voice rang clearly in the high, many-windowed room. "Of course he wants to go. Do you mean to oppose the appointment, Dr. McCulloch?"

McCulloch looked at her and then at James Henry. James Henry stopped nibbling his little-finger nail and plunged his hand in his pocket like a naughty schoolboy. Dr. McCulloch cocked an eyebrow. "I shall not give it my unqualified approval," he said with calm ruthlessness. "I don't think you're fitted for the job, Lightbody, and anyway you're much more use to the organization here with me. I'm sorry if it's a disappointment." He went back into his office.

James Henry sat down on a high stool. His mind was whirling. He thought of the house in Welwyn. He thought of Mexico.

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He thought of Margaret. He thought of two thousand a year with a cost-of-living subsidy. For the last three days he had been happy and reasonably sure of himself; after the effects of BZ nine-eighty-two had worn off, love had been there to take over the job of making a man of him. Now, under the impact of events, his happiness and new-found assurance had deserted him. He propped his chin on his hands and sat staring gloomily at a bottle-lined wall.

Meanwhile, Margaret Kendall was eavesdropping. She removed her ear from the keyhole of Dr. McCulloch's office, straightened, and walked across to James Henry. "He's just fixed up to go and see Dingle," she whispered angrily. "What *can* we do, darling?"

"Do . . . do you want me to get the job?" James Henry asked.

"Of course! It's a tremendous promotion, isn't it?"

"What about us? What about that little house in Welwyn?"

"The little house can wait," Margaret muttered, staring into the middle distance. "After we come back from Mexico we can think about buying houses . . . if we ever get to Mexico, that is."

At that moment a lab boy came in with the mid-morning tea—a tray laid with a teapot and three cups and saucers. He put the tray down, nodded cheerfully, and went out again.

Presently Margaret broke a lugubrious silence. "BZ nine-eighty-two's water-soluble, isn't it?"

"Yes," James Henry said.

"Well, what are we waiting for?" She moved with a stride of Amazonian determination to the tea-tray, collecting the samples of BZ nine-eighty-two on the way. She poured out a cup of tea, stirred in a teaspoonful of the grey powder and three lumps of sugar to disguise its bitterness, and crossed to the door of Dr. McCulloch's office. When she emerged a few seconds later, smiling like a beautiful Siamese cat, James Henry said, wide-eyed, "Margaret!"

"Don't you remember?" she queried. "Don't you remember how we loved everybody and everything? He's fond of you, you know, in a twisted sort of way, and with that dose of nine-eighty-two inside him he won't oppose the appointment, darling; he's more likely to tell Dingle that you're the very man."

"Yes," James Henry said slowly. "I suppose so." He was wondering what was worrying him.

Some ten minutes later Dr. McCulloch emerged from his office, walked through the laboratory, and out into the corridor without saying a word. Margaret glanced at her watch. "Five minutes to get there," she said. "He should be ripening nicely."

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James Henry made no reply, only glanced longingly at the BZ nine-eighty-two. Things were going too fast for him and he didn't know whether he was on his head or his heels. A shot of nine-eighty-two would be the very thing. He havered for a minute or so and then, when Margaret wasn't looking, strolled across and helped himself from the sample.

Half an hour later McCulloch returned. With conscious deliberation James Henry finished a sketch of the complicated glass set-up he had been making, and swung round on his high stool. McCulloch was smiling gaily.

"Well," he said, "I changed my mind, Jim. I approved the appointment. If you think you can handle the job, I'm not the man to stand in your way."

James Henry grinned. "Thanks, R.M."

"You'd better cut along and see Dingle now," McCulloch went on. "It's a rush job and they want to get you out there as quickly as possible. He wants to discuss your cost-of-living subsidy."

"Right," James Henry said crisply, sliding off his stool. "I shan't be long."

McCulloch, dark eyes gleaming with friendly amusement, held open the door for him. "Remarkable stuff, this BZ nine-eighty-two, Jim," he said.

James Henry chuckled. "Isn't it just?" he said.

"You had a nerve to lace my tea with it, but I forgive you."

James Henry chuckled again; then he dug Dr. McCulloch gently in the ribs in a suitably roguish manner, and set off towards the Appointments Office with the long-legged stride of a human dynamo.

He screwed a far fatter cost-of-living subsidy out of Ebenezer Dingle than that case-hardened gentleman had dreamt of authorizing.

Afterwards, whistling softly under his breath, James Henry made his way back to the laboratory. He found the big room empty. He peered into the office that he shared with Margaret, but that was empty too.

Then he heard a murmur and a gasp coming from the half-open door of Dr. McCulloch's office. He approached the door cautiously.

Dr. Robert McCulloch was biting Margaret's ear, and from where James Henry stood it did not look as if she were being unappreciative.

Soundlessly, James Henry moved away. With his face set, he left the laboratory and took the escalator to the canteen floor at the top of the building. He kicked open the swing doors of the

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restaurant and bar reserved for Heads of Departments and Research Officers of Grade 2 and above, and walked stiff-legged to the bar, just opening up for the lunch-hour.

"Gimme a Scotch," he said to the barman. "Make it a big one, and make it quick."

In an adobe hut in a godforsaken village of Baján, in Mexico's San Marcos Valley, James Henry Lightbody sat at a rough table, writing a letter. It was June and the air was hell-hot. As he wrote, James Henry reached for the tequila bottle, poured himself a slug, and slightly diluted it with warm lime juice.

. . . *Far from being angry with you, Margaret,* he wrote, sweat running off his forehead to drip down onto the front of his soiled khaki shirt, *I am delighted to hear that you are going to marry Robert McCulloch. You are obviously made for one another* . . .

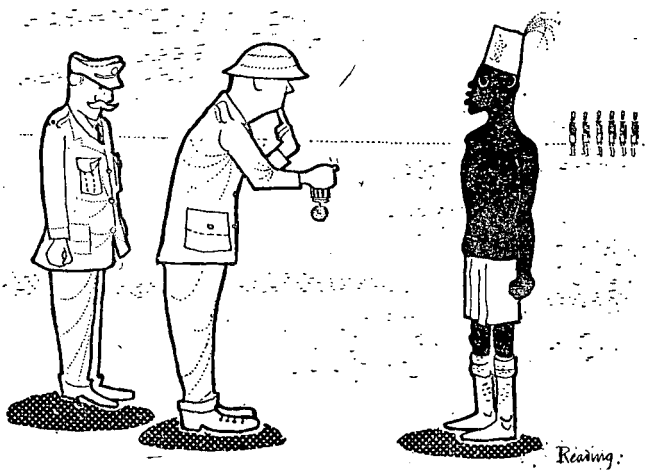
Presently he finished the letter and sat back on the packing-case he was using as a seat, straddling his long legs. He grinned. Prim, well brought up, too damned intelligent, managing, and just a little too ambitious for a self-respecting man to marry—McCulloch was welcome to her.

He raised his glass. "Good luck to you, Maggie."

A vulture landed with a soft thump by the body of the dead burro outside.

Carmencita came in, carrying his lunch on a tray.

"Carmencita," James Henry said masterfully. "Vengas! Come, little cat, I hunger for your lips . . . Arrrh!"



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Frail & Fair

A woman and a glass are always in danger

Spanish Proverb

Look not thou upon the wine when it is red . . . At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.

Thine eyes behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.

Proverbs xxiii

Many a Sip

Following the direction of Mrs. Nickleby's eyes, Kate was quite terrified by the apparition of an old black velvet cap, which, by slow degrees, as if its wearer were ascending a ladder or pair of steps, rose above the wall dividing their garden from that of the next cottage . . . and was gradually followed by a very large head, and an old face in which were a pair of most extraordinary grey eyes: very wild, very wide open, and rolling in their sockets, with a dull languishing leering look, most ugly to behold.

" Queen of my soul," replied the stranger, folding his hands together, " this goblet sip! "

" Nonsense, sir," said Mrs. Nickleby. " Kate, my love, pray be quiet."

" Won't you sip the goblet? " urged the stranger, with his head imploringly on one side, and his right hand on his breast. " Oh, do sip the goblet! "

" I shall not consent to do anything of the kind, sir," said Mrs. Nickleby. " Pray, begone."

CHARLES DICKENS, *Nicholas Nickleby*

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Looking-Glass

She's no mistress of mine
That drinks not her wine,
Or frowns at my friends' drinking notions;
If my heart thou would'st gain
Drink thy bottle of champagne:
'Twill serve thee for paint and love-potions.

SIR WILLIAM DAVENANT, *She Would if She Could*

Home Brew

Ilya Artamanov, blazing, dishevelled, was staring at Baimakova, shouting straight into her rosy face:

" Kinswoman, I drink your mead to you. It's as sweet as its maker! "

She raised a round, white arm, and the sunlight flashed on her golden bracelet, set with stones of many colours, and gleamed in the pearls on her breast. Like the rest, she had been drinking. A languid smile shone in the grey eyes, and her parted lips quivered temptingly. They clinked glasses, and she drank and bowed to her kinsman. He tossed his shaggy head, crying rapturously:

" You have manners, kinswoman! Princely manners, so help me God! "

Pyotr realized vaguely that his father was not behaving well.

M. GORKY, *The Artamanovs*

Good Excuse

For let 'em be clumsy, or let 'em be slim,
Young or ancient, I care not a feather;
So fill a pint bumper quite up to the brim,
So fill up your glasses, nay, fill to the brim,
And let us e'en toast them together.
Let the toast pass,
Drink to the lass,
I'll warrant she'll prove an excuse for a glass.

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN, *The School for Scandal*

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By Jove!

Wine, indeed, and girls are good,
But brave victuals feast the blood,
For wenches, wine and lusty cheer,
Jove would leap down to surfeit here.

JOHN LYLY, *Alexander and Campaspe*

Sour Grapes

"I don't understand your taste, that's all; but then I suppose I'm exceptional altogether; I don't like olives, and I don't care about women."

"Quite right," swore the Earl, under his moustaches; "both of 'em make you buy the nice rose flavour with too salt a bitterness."

"I don't know anything about the bitterness, thank God, I never travelled to that stage," laughed Strathmore: "but olives tempt one to drink, and women tempt one to weakness, and when either the love or the brandy's taken too strong, we lose our heads and tell our secrets; and, on the whole, I think two bottles less detrimental than one woman. Wine steals our wits, but Dalilah does worse;—because she's a tongue to ask questions."

"Devil take your philosophy."

OUIDA, *Strathmore*

Wishful Drinking

Could man be drunk for ever
With liquor, love, or fights,
Lief would I rouse at morning
And lief lie down of nights.

A. E. HOUSMAN

Glasses and lasses are brittle ware.

Scottish Proverb

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A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

" Hold everything ! " he said
" It's the story of the year "

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

IT was at the Annual Fair on Helenwood Common, on a hot evening in August, that Detective Sergeant Petrella first met Slippery Sam.

To the police of Q Division, the Fair, through the whole of its fourteen-day run, was a simple and unrelieved nuisance. It disrupted traffic, excited youth, upset licensing regulations, and attracted into the Division a floating population of undesirables with a hard core of really unpleasant characters.

All of which meant extra duty.

Petrella was strolling slowly with the crowd that filled the narrow avenue between two rows of booths. The ground underfoot was trodden to powdered dust, and thick upon the dust lay the paper and tin foil, the cartons and bottle tops, the detritus that the human race spews around it when it takes its pleasure. On all sides, men—sensible family men who would think twice about placing a shilling on an even chance in the Derby—were throwing away their money with crazed abandon on games of so-called skill and chance; games in which there was little skill, in which the chances were heavily weighted against them, and the prizes not worth winning.

Just ahead of him moved a trio of prosperous citizens, with thinning hair and spreading waistlines, who were out for an evening in search of their departed youth.

" Let's have a bang at bottle-popping," said the red-faced leader of the trio. " I'll bet half a dollar I knock down more than you, Toppy."

" You'll lose," said the middle one. " You never could shoot worth a damn. All you're good at is rolling pennies onto boards. That right, Charles? "

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Charles said that was right. Old Hubert couldn't hit a haystack at five yards with a howitzer.

Hubert, more nettled, Petrella guessed, by being called old than by the slurs cast on his marksmanship, came to rest in front of a shooting-stall. The equipment consisted of four air-rifles, and for target there was a choice between a number of bottles, upside-down on wooden stakes, and a ping-pong ball precariously maintaining its balance on a tired jet of water.

"You hit that ball in six shots, Hubert, and I'll buy you a house, eh, Toppy?"

"Make it twelve," said Toppy, "and chuck in a car as well."

Thus goaded, Hubert slapped down a florin on the counter, examined the guns with a judgmatic air, and reached out for the newest-looking.

Reached out, but failed to make contact. A man's hand got there first, and whisked the gun away.

"That's a special gun," said the newcomer coolly. "Reserved for little me." He picked it up and started to load it. Little was right. He wasn't much more than half Hubert's size but there was an air of unregenerate impertinence about him which attracted Petrella. He thought of a sparrow and a thrush, at war over a snail.

"Special gun be jiggered," said Hubert. "I saw it first. You put it down at once."

"Go and boil yourself," said the small man distinctly.

Hubert said, "If you're asking to have your block knocked off, you've come to the right shop."

"Now, gents—" said the owner of the stall.

"He's just a big bag of lard," said a tough-looking character, pointing a large thumb at Hubert. "Don't you stand for it, mate."

"You keep out of this," said Toppy to the tough character.

"Gents—" said the stall owner.

A lot happened then, more or less at the same time. The tough character took a step forward. Toppy grabbed him round the arms. A thin man with a lock of hair over one eye like Sam Weller's appeared from nowhere and grabbed Hubert. The small man dropped the gun and was seized by Charles. They were all too close together to do each other much harm, but Petrella felt it was time to intervene.

He bored his way ruthlessly into the crowd, using his toes and elbows as he had learnt at recruit school. When Petrella reached the storm centre, he wheeled sharply about and said, "You better drop it, all of you."

"And who the hell are you?" said Toppy.

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" I'm a police officer," said Petrella, with great clarity, " and if any of you want to go on with this argument you can do it at the station."

He saw a uniformed constable pushing his way towards him, but the heart had already gone out of the opposition.

" Now someone tell me what all this is about," he said.

Hubert had recovered some of his poise. " I'm glad you're here, officer," he said. " This man made a quite uncalled-for—"

" Which man? " said Petrella.

" Why—bless my soul! He was here a moment ago. Where did he go? "

The sparrow had hopped off. Even Petrella, whose attention had not been distracted, had failed to see him go.

" Then these other gentlemen—my friends will bear me out—"

" There was a tough character," said Toppy. " I don't see him now, but I got my arms round him, to prevent him butting in—"

" And then another man got hold of me," said Hubert.

" That's right," said Charles. " A tall thin man, with a bit of a cow's lick. Bless me, if he hasn't scarpered too."

" In that case," said Petrella firmly, " since all the relevant witnesses seem to have vanished, I'd suggest that—"

He was interrupted by a cry of pure anguish. Hubert's hand was clutched to his side. For a moment Petrella thought that the excitement and shock had brought on some sort of heart attack.

" My wallet," said Hubert faintly. " More than fifty quid, in notes—"

Back at Highside Police Station they held the post-mortem.

" There seem to have been three men in it at least," said Petrella. " The little man who provoked you over the air-gun—"

" Was *he* in it? "

" Certainly. These boys usually work in a group. Sometimes as many as half a dozen of them. Then there was the big chap who threatened to intervene, and took people's eyes off the ball. And last but not least—"

" The man who held me. The thin one, with the remarkable quiff of hair."

" Yes," said Petrella. " He'd be the actual operator. The only thing is, I rather think he may have been wearing a wig. I remember thinking at the time that his hair looked a little too good to be true."

" All I can say is," observed Hubert stiffly, " that if you knew how these people operated, and had all these suspicions, you might have intervened a little sooner and saved my fifty quid.

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I'm not insured or anything, and it's a very serious loss. The money in the wallet wasn't all mine."

Petrella could have pointed out that, in that case, a crowded fairground was a silly place to carry it. But he had long grown used to the fact that one of the functions of a policeman was to serve as a scapegoat.

"You can be sure," he said, "that we shall do everything possible to apprehend the people concerned."

Secretly, he thought it unlikely that he would see any of them again. If they belonged to a group operating in the Fair, they would move with it.

But as that autumn turned into winter, and winter into spring, he became less certain.

The indications were casual, at first. An increase in pocket-picking and larceny from unguarded premises. But as the coups became more ambitious, growing with their success, a pattern became discernible. It was the planning which was remarkable. Where the ordinary sneak-thief would seize his chance in some moment of confusion, the gang now operating relied on no such haphazard methods. They took the initiative. They manufactured their own chances, stage-managing each one with zealous application.

It was they who started the riot on the Highside Wanderers' football ground, and cleaned up more than twenty wallets from embattled partisans; who introduced hecklers in a meeting of Councillor Hayes's Ratepayers' Association and turned out the lights at a point when the meeting was becoming really heated; who arranged for a man to appear on the roof of a shop in the High Street, dressed only in woollen underclothes and a balaclava helmet. By the time the fire brigade arrived, a rich harvest had been reaped from gaping crowds of Christmas shoppers. And the man on the roof had disappeared.

In the files of Q Division, who were chiefly favoured with their attentions, a considerable dossier began to accumulate. Higher authority delivered itself of a series of sarcastic minutes, and the press began to sit up and take notice.

Petrella, who was one of the few policemen to have seen the principal operator at close quarters, had memories of a long sardonic clown's face and a pair of twinkling eyes. He called him Slippery Sam, and, for want of any more official identification, the name passed into general use.

"The trouble is," said Superintendent Haxtell, "that we're not used to dealing with criminals with imagination. Most of their methods are as old as the hills. They're in the books. All

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we've got to do is look them up. Then we come across something new, and we're scuppered."

"Perhaps he'll move on somewhere else," suggested Petrella hopefully.

Sam did not move. His next effort was a small one, but it had important results. It brought Councillor Hayes to Highside Police Station.

Councillor Hayes is one of those men, essential to the smooth running of democracy, whose dedicated task it is to keep officials on their toes. The particular object of his attentions had for some time been the police force. The malicious hinted that this particular object of his zeal dated from the time when a police constable had caused the Councillor to be summonsed three times in a fortnight for parking offences; but that was mere idle gossip.

"Your wife was shopping in the High Street when this occurred?" said Petrella.

"That's right. And this man—this fraud—was standing in front of Gummidge's window, with one arm tucked inside his jacket, and wearing a row of war medals—stolen, I've no doubt."

"And the little girl?"

"The little girl was crying. My wife's a very soft-hearted woman."

"I'm sure she is," said Petrella.

Councillor Hayes looked at him suspiciously. Then he went on, "The little girl wanted to be lifted up to look at the Christmas tree in the window. Her father—he said he was her father—couldn't lift her because he'd only got one arm. So my wife lifted her up."

"And had to put her bag down while she did so?"

"Of course."

"I see," said Petrella.

"But the man didn't go near her bag. He was on the other side."

"It would have been an accomplice who actually rifled the bag," said Petrella. "I suppose she didn't notice—"

"She didn't even know she'd lost the money," said Councillor Hayes, "until she opened her bag in a shop five minutes later. It was a serious loss. Very serious indeed. She was on her way to the bank to put away some of the funds of the Ratepayers' Association, of which I have the honour to be Chairman and Treasurer."

"That's bad luck on the ratepayers," said Petrella.

"Every penny of Association funds that my wife lost," said Councillor Hayes stiffly, "has already been replaced out of my own pocket."

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" It was a stupid thing for me to say," said Petrella later to Superintendent Haxtell. " In fact I don't know why I did. He's a thundering nuisance but I'm sure he's quite honest."

" It wasn't very sensible," agreed Haxtell. He was fingering the pages of the current edition of the *Highside Mercury*, a weekly of broadly liberal views. " Did you know that Hayes was on the Board of the *Mercury*? "

" I haven't had time to read it lately."

" You should. There's a leader this week, it's headed—" Haxtell cleared his throat impressively—" *The New Fascists. Certain ominous symptoms of a fascist-type interference—whether officially inspired or not, the* Mercury *would hesitate to say—in the business of electing and conducting the apparatus of Local Government in certain London Boroughs including your own Borough of Highside and Helenwood* . . . What do you think of that? "

" It doesn't seem," said Petrella cautiously, " to have a verb in it. What's it all about? "

" As far as I can gather, it's something Gwilliam did. He had nothing much to do one evening, so he looked in on a meeting of the Ratepayers' Association. Old Hayes was well under way. He was winding up with one of his favourite rhetorical questions —' What do the police do? ' And Gwilliam piped up from the back and said, ' Work eighteen hours a day for next to nothing.' This brought the house down, and wrecked Hayes's carefully prepared peroration. It's no laughing matter. A lot of people knew Gwilliam by sight, and the papers—particularly the *Mercury*—made out that it was an officially inspired job."

" Surely no one believed that, sir? "

" People will believe anything if you tell it them often enough," said Haxtell. " And one thing we're not going to do is get ourselves mixed up in politics. You find this damned pickpocket, and put him where he belongs."

Petrella had a word with Gwilliam, whom he found quite unrepentant. " Silly old man," he said. " Why should he say anything he likes about us, and us not answer back? Are we children? "

" Because he's a newspaper proprietor," said Petrella, " and a Borough Councillor."

" If what I'm hearing's right," said Gwilliam, " he mayn't be that after the elections next month. Had you thought of that? "

Petrella had not thought of it. Borough Council elections were not a thing which interested him greatly, although he was aware that they took place from time to time.

" This year," said Gwilliam, " the Tories and the Socialists

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are both putting up candidates. And there's all the Independents who had seats before. They're not going to give them up just because a new lot are coming along. To say nothing of the Cranks."

The Highside and Helenwood Borough Council had, for many years, been run in part by a hard-working and public-spirited body of men and women who called themselves Independents, and in part by representatives of pressure groups, such as the powerful Ratepayers' Association, whose champion Councillor Hayes was; the Licensed Victuallers, whose object it was to open more public houses for longer hours; the Total Abstinence League, who sought to shut public houses down altogether; and the Friends of Dumb Creatures, who had scored a signal victory the year before in the passage of a bye-law forbidding the driving of horses and carts up Highside Hill.

With the advent of party politics it was clear, as Sergeant Gwilliam said, that there were not going to be enough seats to go round. And loudly though the existing Councillors complained of the strain and overwork of their job, curiously enough, when it came to the point, none of them seemed anxious to lay down the burden.

On the contrary, serious electioneering was soon in full swing. This meant unusually large crowds, and more work for the police.

"If this is taking an interest in politics," said Petrella to Gwilliam as, for the third successive night, they assisted the uniformed branch to cope with the rush, "you can have it."

"Did you see the *Mercury* this morning?" said Gwilliam. "They're attacking the railways now. Good strong stuff, too. *Ratepayers, unite! You have nothing to lose but your trains.*"

"I'm glad they're off the police for once."

"They'll be back again," said Gwilliam. "There's the Lord High Ratepayer himself."

The occasion was an eve-of-poll overflow meeting of the Ratepayers' Association at the local Oddfellows Hall. Councillor Hayes, wearing a large rosette, was descending from a car, accompanied by campaign secretaries and flanked by supporters. The subject matter of the meeting, according to the notices, was "Necessary Economies," and the size of the crowd bore witness to the fact that there is no more popular topic than the proposition that other people should spend less of your money.

"Looks pleased with himself, doesn't he?" said Gwilliam.

"Yes," said Petrella. "Hold on a moment—I'll be back."

It could easily have been imagination. The moment that Councillor Hayes entered the hall, the crowd had shifted and thinned as the late-comers streamed in after him. And under a

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lamp post Petrella had suddenly seen a figure he thought he recognized. It wasn't the face, which in any event was hidden under a broad-brimmed hat. But it was something about the slimness of the figure, the set of the shoulders, the jaunty cock of the head.

When he reached the lamp post, the man had gone. He saw him again clearly, twenty yards up the street. Then, as suddenly as he had come, he was gone again.

"Witchcraft," said Petrella.

He edged his way through the thinning crowd, and found an answer. At the point where the man had vanished, a back alley led off, down the side of the Oddfellows Hall. It was a dead end, which clearly served some emergency exit. And it was empty.

"Curiouser and curiouser," said Petrella. There was only one way out. It was a doorway, with big double doors to it, of the sort, he guessed, which would be closed on the inside by a long horizontal bar or riot bolt. He pressed against it, but without result. Then, on the smooth surface, he felt a cuphook. He slipped his finger through it and pulled. The doors came open towards him. The cross-bolt inside had been lashed in the "free" position with a handkerchief. Somebody had done some careful preparatory work at the Oddfellows Hall that evening; and Petrella had a feeling that he knew who it was.

Ahead of him a flight of concrete steps led upwards. There was nothing to do but follow them. On the first landing, which he guessed would be somewhere near the platform, was a door, and behind the door a crack of light.

Somewhere beyond, but muted by the interval of two walls, there came to his ears the roar of a crowd settling down to an enjoyable witch-hunt.

The door was marked *Committee Room*. Petrella considered various methods of tackling the job that lay ahead, but decided that there was no alternative to the direct approach.

He opened the door gently and looked inside. The thin man had his back to him. He was standing in front of a desk, all the drawers of which were wide open, and he was finishing packing something into a bulging briefcase.

Petrella's foot struck a loose board. The man turned, snapped his case shut, and with the agility of a professional clown, slid a chair into Petrella's path.

Petrella saved his neck by going onto his hands and knees. He was still effectively blocking the exit to the stairs. The thin man hesitated, then whipped round, opened the big door behind him, and went through it.

Petrella went after him.

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The door opened direct into the auditorium, just below the platform. The thin man was scudding up the side aisle, walking, but moving as fast as most men would run. Petrella went on after him. The curious thing was no one else in the hall seemed to take any notice of them at all. Their attention was concentrated on a venerable gentleman with white hair who had risen from the audience to ask the speaker a question. The question was obviously an important one, and clearly also one of those helpful questions that speakers welcome, since Councillor Hayes was smiling broadly as he prepared to answer it.

The next moment, the smile was wiped from his face. Feeling Petrella's hand on his shoulder, the thin man dived to his left, past the earnest inquirer with the white hair. Petrella launched himself in a flying tackle, and the three men went down together.

At this moment all the lights in the hall were extinguished.

The reporter on the *Highside Mercury* had a seat near the emergency exit. He escaped first, slammed the door behind him to discourage competitors, and ran all the way to the office.

"Hold everything," he said to the Editor, for he was a young man, and impetuous. "It's the story of the year. Police try to break up Ratepayers' Meeting. I recognized the man who did it. Perella—Petrella—some foreign name. *And* then they turned the lights out. But not quick enough."

The Editor was a man of few words. "You're sure it was a policeman? Excellent. We're all ready to print, but we can clear the front page if we rush it. Better dictate it straight to my secretary. Ready?"

The young reporter took a deep breath. "One of the most scandalous outrages in the municipal history of Highside . . ."

The other members of the press, fortunately for themselves, did not make such a quick getaway. By the time the lights had been switched on and things had been sorted out, the true facts were beginning to become apparent.

The essential points were that Petrella was still attached to Slippery Sam and Sam was attached to a briefcase containing the not-yet-banked takings of the charity bazaar that Mrs. Hayes had opened in the hall that afternoon.

With sober satisfaction the agency representative sent an account of this police triumph to six morning and three evening papers, with further syndication to the provinces. He managed, through the good offices of the *Helenwood Gazette*, to arrange for a picture of the white-haired gentleman, who turned out to be Professor Lockhart-Murray, the Civics expert, shaking hands with a blushing Petrella.

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" It is the first time," said the Professor, " that I have ever experienced the direct impact of our police in action. I was most impressed."

On the following morning at eight o'clock, the *Highside Mercury* was on sale.

By ten past eight, twelve people had telephoned the Editor who, as usual after press night, was still in bed. By half past eight the Editor was dressed and in his office, answering a telephone call from Councillor Hayes.

By ten o'clock the solicitors to the paper had been summoned into conference, that morning's issue of the *Highside Mercury* had sold out, and the telephone on the desk of the Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions was ringing. At two o'clock that afternoon Detective Sergeant Petrella called, by appointment, on a very great man indeed.

Romer, an Assistant Commissioner in charge of C.I.D., had a long, bleak face, reminiscent of a hanging judge, and an eye that had impressed a generation of policemen and criminals alike.

" There's no doubt at all," he said, " that you personally could ask for very heavy damages for libel. You are mentioned by name. The allegation is a scandalous one, and in addition quite untrue. And the newspaper concerned behaved with great carelessness. In fact, they would settle out of court."

" I don't want their money, sir," said Petrella unhappily.

" Good," said the Assistant Commissioner. " Then I think a printed apology will meet the case. I shall have great pleasure in composing it myself." He paused for a moment and his forbidding face broke into a warm smile. " I'm glad to have met you," he said. " It gives me an opportunity to say that I think you behaved very creditably."

As Petrella stepped out into Whitehall, it was raining. So far as he was concerned, it could have been snowing. It would have made no difference at all.

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RAISIN WHY

That sweetbread gazing up at me
Is not what it purports to be.
Says Webster in one paragraph,
It is the pancreas of the calf.
Since it is neither sweet nor bread,
I think I'll take a bun instead.

OGDEN NASH, *The Sweetbread*

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DEW LINE APPLES

A woman, he thought bitterly,
all this madness for a woman

BY DAVID WALKER

NO one had brought a drum this year. The old man's drum was a frying-pan. He danced and sang to a metal beat. He told an old tale of a caribou hunt. The old man's face was grey and wet and happy. Then coughing racked him. He spat into a can politely, and sat again and coughed. Grown people and children coughed, and wind was loud against the mission hut. There was much happiness for Easter.

Peter Nakoyak watched Mary Avakana across the room. Her face was brown from the sun of spring, and her cheeks were red as the Dew-Line apples from the store. He watched her, but she would not look at him. *Look at me!* he willed her. Then Mary's black eyes came to him and left him.

There was one White Man here. His name was Canon Harper. Long ago the People called him Okpik because of his spectacles and his nose; now, with old man's hair and beard, Okpik was truly like the great white owl. He came by dog-team every Easter. He had brought Peter with him from the Dew Line, the distant-early-warning radar defence line where he was working.

An old woman danced and sang of battle with a polar bear. Okpik frowned at the frying-pan drum. Only the old people still knew the old dances. The young people waited patiently for real dancing to begin, which would be after the feast was over.

Okpik said grace. They had pilot biscuits and raspberry jam and tea. Peter sat beside Mary on the bench. His knee touched hers. She glanced round at him and smiled. Okpik was watching them, and smiling.

" After the feast," Peter murmured for her alone, " we will go to Okpik, and then tomorrow . . ."

He looked at her. She wrinkled her nose in the way that means No.

She meant No to marriage with him. She likes me, Peter thought; I know she likes me. But he did not know; so he

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began to talk about feasts of meats and pies and eggs and cakes and tarts and fruits, rich feasts three times every day down on the Dew Line where Peter drove a tractor, or as he would say, skinned a " Cat."

" Pilot and jam," he said. " Nobody would eat such things."

" They are good-tasting things," said Mary. She crunched white teeth to meet through red raspberry jam and pilot. " Too many feasts," she said, " make no feasts."

He tried to explain about other things she did not know, like his mighty " Cat." But Mary was so beautiful that his heart beat fast, and then she moved her knee from his. She was not clever about " Cats," or perhaps he had not explained them well.

" Is it a *tigmiak-puk*? " A big bird, a flying machine, she meant—for Mary had seen aeroplanes often.

" No," he said with patience. " It does not fly. It pulls sleds —ten great ones all together. Also it pushes snow. It is strong, and I am the driver." Peter breathed deep to swell his chest. His " Cat " was strong, and he was strong.

Mary was looking round at him again, and her eyes were bright, perhaps admiring the bigness of him. " Push snow? " she said. " Why do such a foolish thing? Make a house with snow, and cook with snow. But *push* snow? " She was not admiring him. She was laughing at him, Peter Nakoyak, a better cat-skinner now than any of the White Men. " You're the best of the bunch, Pete," the Boss had said, " I'm giving you a rise."

So Peter explained about roads and landing-strips, about the great drifts that must be bulldozed after each new blow. Mary finished another round hard pilot with raspberry jam, and drank tea. The guitar was tuning up.

" Now do you understand? " he asked her.

Mary wrinkled her brow in the way that means Yes. But also she shrugged, and he thought, She is silly. But he saw the lift of her shoulders and the soft tide of her bosom, and Peter trembled, and he thought, She is silly about the new things because she lives far in the north with old grandparents, and she hunts and traps as well as a man, yes I know, but she is my woman, and soon she will learn that the old things are stupid now for us. Everyone else knows that. Alice Aluyak knows it. I need only say to Alice . . . So then Peter began to boast a little, which is not the way of the People, about making ten years of money in one single year, with a savings account, and thousands of credit at the Company. He knew, but did not say, that Mary had no credit at the Company. She would trade her foxes and her bearskins for shells and nets and this and that . . .

Mary turned to look at him. " Big shot! " she said in English.

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She had been to the mission school when Okpik lived there always, and they were children, and Mary nothing to Peter, not noticed by him. Then she had gone home to the far old north; but Peter had gone to the near new north. He saw her every Easter, until suddenly last year he *saw* her. And now he was rich, and she tortured him. He had the wristwatch for her in his pocket; he had the ring for her in his new leather wallet.

Guitar and squeeze-box gave the tune. Boys crossed to claim their girls. Some married men took wives, who slipped babies round and out from behind their backs and gave them to old women or to bigger sisters. Peter left Mary's side; he went over in his sky-blue-nylon parka and chose Alice Aluyak to be his partner. He saw Jimmy Kaluk ask Mary.

The dance began. The mission hut shook to stamping feet; light, clever, soft-shod, flying feet. Spin the partner and spin again. Alleman right and alleman left, shining faces, laughing faces, storm the circle and swing again.

" You are strong," panted Alice in Peter's ear.

And you are fat, he thought, with grief inside and a laughing face, and he swung dumpy Alice, and here was Mary, laughing too, but not looking at him, his hand at the innermost curve of her waist, no weight in the firm strong yielding body . . .

The dance ended. The People sweated and were happy. Peter was happy, too, but the hurt of her mocking stayed. He moved at the first quick beats to Mary, and took her hand. He was a merry fellow. " Me your Big shot, you my Pin-up," he said in English. She looked puzzled, not knowing Pin-up. But she smiled and moved close to him, and they danced all night.

Next afternoon was the dog-team race for a bag of flour presented by Okpik. It was *hila kapuk*, the murky weather, when sky and white sea are one. Not cold, about twenty below. The boys on the Dew Line thought always of cold, and Peter had learnt to judge it in degrees.

Peter did not own a team. He had never had dogs since he drove his father's as a child. Mary and he were still close from dancing, even after separation and a sleep of dreams; and he had not spoken again of marriage. He helped her fix the double-tandem trace of two and two and one to the light sled she had borrowed. Mary's team was twelve. They were big dogs, not fat, not thin—well rested after travelling eight sleeps from home.

" It is a good team," he said, and he offered to help her harness the chosen five. The dogs were frantic, howling and tugging at the line. Only the white leader sat calmly, knowing that he would be chosen.

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"Take Idvaluk, then," she said. "He is quiet."

She means quiet for a stranger, Peter thought. Quiet for a cat-skinner. He went to Idvaluk, the lead-dog, and cuffed him on the head to show friendliness but mastery, gripped his collar, freed him from the dog-chain, and hustled him over to the trace. He was clumsy with the harness, and Mary was going back for the second-wheel dog now already, and then he could not snap the buckle, and then Idvaluk turned and bit Peter's wrist, backed out, and went to kill his enemy, the right-wheel dog, and all was a tangle of fury and hate.

Mary beat them manfully with a chain. "Sit on the anchor!" she ordered Peter. She hitched Idvaluk, and beat him again for better manners.

Peter sat on the anchor while Mary finished. His wrist was painful. He felt unhappy. To sit on the anchor is a lowly job; and also he saw that Idvaluk's left ear was bleeding. He put all his weight on the anchor because the team yelped and strained and plunged. Mary pulled off her duffel parka and stood, almost bare to the murky day; then her arms, head, shoulders, bosom disappeared into the parka; a deft twisting, and she wore deer-skins for the long cold race.

"*Kwana*," she said. Thanks—thanks for what? She jumped on, plucking the anchor from the snow. They raced for the starting-line where ten men and ten teams waited. But Idvaluk was not running straight. He edged from the pain of his wounded ear. "Ho!" called Mary. "Ho! Left! Left!" in her clear girl's voice. Now she will do badly in the race, he thought. And she will not forgive me.

The race was ten miles round a certain island, and ten miles back. Peter watched until a last dark dot had vanished in the dim whiteness of *hila kapuk*, and then he went to the company store and spent some of his riches on a new thirty-thirty carbine, and then he went down to the sea ice again, but there was no sign yet. Okpik came over to speak to him. With beard and moustache cloaked in ice, Okpik looked more than ever like the great white owl.

"And who do you hope will win?" asked Okpik slyly. He made jokes. He was well liked among the People, but with the young ones Okpik was sometimes stern. He did not understand new things.

Okpik is my enemy, Peter thought. He knew that Okpik had spoken old ideas to Mary Avakana. Peter grinned at Okpik, with some badness against him in his heart.

"How is it with you and Mary?" Okpik asked. He had christened them both, and he could ask such things.

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" She will not marry me," said Peter. His smile deserted him. He stared to the east, but no teams were in sight. " She laughs at me," he said to Okpik, who was foolish, but also like a father.

" Mary is a girl of the north," said Okpik, " a rare woman who has learnt the skills of man. She does not laugh in her heart at you; but she fears marriage with you."

" Why is this? " asked Peter. He knew. It was because of Okpik's counsel.

Okpik sighed with a cloud of steam. " Because the days of tractors, of cat-skinners may be over soon, and if the People have no dogs and no traps and no skill in hunting . . ." Okpik must have said this thing so many thousand times that you would think him tired of saying it. But no; Okpik said it like a faulty record on a gramophone machine, for ever.

" But will there not be other Dew Lines, or similar things? " Peter asked respectfully.

Okpik breathed in and blew steam so that his icicles rattled. " Perhaps," he said testily. " But if not—if Mary is seven months heavy with child, and cannot hunt, and you cannot hunt or seal or trap or fish, what then? " Okpik glared at him. He was a terrible old man of God, more like Jehovah than a Canon of the church.

But now he spoke gently. " Peter," he said, " you smile at me and think I am against you. But I have heard what is said of your work down there." He waved his mitt to the south, whence they had come for Easter. " Listen! Of all our young people, you and Mary are the ones in whom I place my highest hopes. Therefore I would dearly love to marry you. But Mary is a strange, strong girl, and wilful. If she will have a hunter to love, cherish, and to obey—then she will have a hunter. My son," he said, " take this year and learn to be a hunter."

But Peter was hearing the beautiful thunder of his " Cat," the mighty clanking of her tracks, the snarl and the heave as she bit into her work, hydraulics true to his lightest touch. Yes, best of all he loved the hydraulics, a hundred men's strength from one man's hand.

" The Bishop says I am too old for travel now," said Okpik. " I will give you my team."

This would be a gift of value. I am rich, Peter thought. I could pay for his dog-team. But he did not want Okpik's dogs. He wanted to skin his " Cat." Peter grunted politely beside Okpik at the winning-post. The white weather was closing in. Okpik sighed. " You will travel south with me tomorrow, then? "

" *Kwana-puk-po*," Peter said. Many thanks. He watched to the east. Who would come first?

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It was a white lead-dog. Mary came first in the dim white weather, calling encouragement to her team, crying, "*Excitement!*" to them in the high thin voice of Tiriganyak, the Fox.

She tied the dogs. "His ear soon numbed," she said of Idvaluk. She chopped seal, and fed them. Peter did not offer help, except in carrying things, and upturning her big sled for the icing of the runners. The icing meant a journey, and that would be tomorrow, to her grandparents in the north. She melted snow on a stove. Then she iced, bare-handed, one runner and the other, and finished, slap, slap, slap of the wet cloth along them.

Then they went together into the shelter of her canvas sled-wrapper, which was rigged as half a tent, and it was warmer, with the stove roaring. Mary drew off her deerskin parka, and Peter saw her lightly clad, and fever grasped him and he took her strongly in his arms. She struggled, but hers was only a woman's strength. Then she did not struggle.

"There is still time. Come now to Okpik."

But she broke from him, and put on her duffel parka, and beat snow from the deerskins, and did not speak.

Peter took out the watch. It was of pure gold, and it ran for ever by itself, and it had a golden strap to fit any wrist, a man's or a woman's, but it was for Mary.

"For you," he said. He held it to her. "It runs for ever by itself," he said, "without winding or attention." She stared at the golden watch, eyes full of wonder, cheeks brighter than their brightness from the wind and the cold and the sun of spring.

Then everything changed. Mary wrinkled her nose in the way that means No.

"It cost many dollars," he said hopefully.

"I will not marry you," she said. "Therefore I cannot take this precious thing."

"Please," he said.

"Also, what use would I have for it?" she said less kindly. "Would it comfort me on my trapline? Would it say, Time to stop 'Cat' pushing snow for this or that number of hours, and time to have another of the many feasts?"

"You are a foolish girl," he said, with a growl in his heart. "What do you know of work and money and well-earned feasts?"

"And you," she said cruelly, "who cannot even hold a dog, who would faint at the sight of Nanuk, the polar bear . . ."

Peter threw down the golden watch. There is little anger among the People, but he felt black rage as he strode through *hila kapuk*, dead-white weather. He saw two pictures in his

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mind: one was his mighty obedient " Cat," the other his hateful beautiful Woman. She is mad, he thought. I will teach her to say that I . .

" I will buy the dogs, the sled, and other things," he said to Okpik.

" Pay the mission," said Okpik gravely. And he stood and gave Peter blessing, and Peter went to tell his widowed mother of a change of plans, and Okpik laughed to himself in an old man's way; but Mary Avakana wept alone.

Now for a whole year Peter learnt the ancient skills. There was much that he remembered from his childhood, and some things were in the marrow of his bones; and he invented new things too, for he had profited from White Man's cunning. It is easy, he thought.

He started with a caribou hunt inland, but caribou were scarce, and Peter missed shots, and he nearly starved.

So it began, and so it went on; through fishing in the summer, through the wicked storms and the dangerous ice of autumn, and into cold dark winter on his trapline, and at the seal holes, and hunting Nanuk far out to sea. He made many mistakes. It is less easy, Peter thought. And he thought often, Mary would laugh at me for that.

But he was strong against cold and hunger. To be lost, alone, in the great white desert on the sea, did not frighten him. He was a man of the People, who are the hardiest men on earth. Peter was learning. A lifetime, he thought humbly, and a man would still be learning.

His widowed mother grumbled about skinning, sewing, chewing. " A woman is old," she grumbled. " This is work for a strong young wife." She meant Alice Aluyak, Peter knew. But he did not want dull dumpy Alice. He wanted his fiery woman of the north. He still wanted his mighty " Cat." Mary drove me to this lunacy, he thought, in the dark moods that assail a man alone; she cheated me of my " Cat."

But always he thought of seeing her at Eastertide, which is the great festival of the People, of sorrow with Our Lord, of joy at Our Lord's rising, and the rising of the sun.

The days were long again. He ran his trapline this final time, and cached the foxes—he had trapped over a hundred in the winter. Then he drove north-west for a black cloud-strip that meant open water. He reached the lead, and followed it for two days, edging north, but he found no bears. He was three sleeps from home.

He ran south for the cape where his foxes were cached, and he

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thought, Mary should come this way. But he had heard no word of Mary all the year. He found no other sled tracks. She is behind me, Peter thought. Or she might have circled wide. Or she might have travelled overland.

There was a barrier of rough ice between him and the cape, formed, as always at this corner of the sea, by the smash and break of autumn storms. He would have swung west, but a new lead had opened to bar his way.

Peter saw the mountainous cape, doubled in height by mirage. He wore glasses against the dazzling light. It was a warm still day. He started through broken ice, taking one small frozen lead, and crossing to the next, and climbing a pinnacle of ice to plot his way. It was easy at first. The sled upset, but that was nothing. He went carefully, easing the drop at each difficult place, for he must not lose the precious mud that coated the runners.

Peter sweated. He anchored to rest a moment, and spy again. The worst part was close ahead, a jagged field of ice-slabs, standing, lying, slanting, jumbled. Beyond that, things seemed easier; and farther on, perhaps a mile away, was the coast below the cape.

Peter looked back, but he saw no other team. What he saw in the north was a paleness—above the pure white of the snow, below the deep blue of the sky. A blow was coming, and soon. There was need to hurry.

Peter hurried. First he lost mud from the front of one runner—a brown frozen chunk, and smaller crumblings. That slowed him. Then the sled upset in a narrow place—not halfway over to rest on its side, but all the way upside-down, and it nearly pinned him. He took off half the load and righted the sled and loaded again.

Then he lost two feet of mud from the other runner, mud and more mud, until the dogs could hardly pull, and so he stopped and knocked off all his mud and ran on steel. Then a dog's neck-trace caught round a column of green hard ice, and the whole team pulled against it and broke its neck. He unhitched the body and tied it on the load. Then the north wind came.

He was nearly through, but the white storm caught him, and he could not see his way, and then he could not see his leader, and the team were pinched between walls of ice, no going forward, no turning back in harness.

He found a place for his dogline. He chained them out. He pitched his tent. He fed seal to the team. He cut snow blocks to break the wind. Peter sat out the blow—or he lay out the blow, in his sleeping-skins.

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The wind thundered and howled and slapped that night. It will change before morning, Peter thought. Then it will drop.

But the wind did not change and it did not drop. The north wind blew harder and colder all next day. Some of his dogs were drifted under, which was a danger. He broke them out, and fed blubber to the team, and they curled up again. He had almost a gallon of paraffin left. He brewed himself a mug of tea, and ate frozen *Irkalukpik*, Arctic char, and shut off the stove, and was warm for a while in his sleeping-skins, and the north wind thundered about the tent.

Tomorrow is *Tukuvik*, the Day of Death, he thought. Surely tomorrow the wind will also die. But the wind did not die, and Peter prayed alone in his tent, and he fed dead dog to the other dogs. The dogs howled in the wind and curled up again. It was full moon tonight, but he saw no moon. He fought back through the blizzard.

A three-day blow, he thought in the tent. Tonight it will end. It is always thus. And he thought, I will travel through, with only half a sleep to rest the dogs, and I shall be there late on *Makivik*, the Day of Resurrection, and Mary and I will rejoice together, and we will say to Okpik . . .

But grey night paled to whiteness, and still the north wind blew. The dogs were now weak. The last of the blubber ran through their stomachs. Peter ate the last of his frozen fish, pink and delicious. There was still dog-meat. The wind still blew on Easter Day.

It will never end, he thought. I will never see Mary, and Okpik is flying this year, and he will be gone, after marrying Mary to Jimmy Kaluk. Now Peter was bitter in his heart against them all; and through the cruel wind he heard the music of his tractor, his mighty " Cat," obedient, strong. A woman, he thought. All this madness for a woman!

And then he heard a difference in the great north wind against his tent. It surged and slackened and thundered again, but the wind was edging to the east. A change was coming.

The gusts were still mighty, less frequent, then less strong. The wind fell as it veered. Peter brewed tea, and lay again in his sleeping-skins. He slept, but his mind kept track of the dying wind. The dogs howled once at something. He called to them. They were quiet again.

Peter slept, and he had a dream. It was a dream, or a nightmare, of the broken ice, white, blue, and green, statues and forms and razor edges—Okpik, the great white owl—Tiriganyak, the small white fox—a mountain of ice that was his " Cat "—a snow-house in the glittering ice—a woman's body, perfect in the ice—

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all the cold live tales in ice that every traveller has seen. But the pictures grew. They towered to pounce on him, to smash and grind and roar on him, to crack . . .

Peter ran from the tent. He cowed the nearest dogs enough to hear another hubbub to the east, whence the sound of a shot had come. There was no wind, and the moon was high, and it was cold. He put on deerskins, took the thirty-thirty and the hatchet. Peter climbed and dropped and ran eastwards on the narrow lead. That ended. He did not find another.

Here was a pressure ridge, high as a White Man's house. He crossed it. The frenzy of his own dogs fell behind. The frenzy of others was closer now, and another sound, which was angry Nanuk, the polar bear.

And now a great heap of ice—slabs, blocks, and towers. He climbed again. His legs were tired. He panted. He saw this picture clearly in the moonlight: live dogs on a chain; dogs plucked from the chain, and dead; and one dog dragging its hindlegs into battle, and one dog that crawled away; and on the snow a rifle; and before him Nanuk, standing in anger, weaving in anger, darkness of blood on the bear's right shoulder. Beyond the bear was a dog, darting in and out. Beyond the dog, a man. Nanuk was forcing man and dog into a closed place in the ice.

I cannot fire, Peter thought. I should kill the man. He held his carbine until the very last moment, until the heat of Nanuk was in his nose. He dropped it then, and took the hatchet in both his hands, and raised it, and came over Nanuk's curving back, and smote Nanuk with all his might. The axe-head clove into Nanuk's skull, and the handle broke, and Nanuk fell dead. Rest well, Nanuk, he thought, in the way of the People.

"Peter!" she said, for the man was Mary Avakana, and in the moonlight he had not seen the difference of her parka and her hood.

So Peter embraced Mary with the strength of a man who has just split Nanuk's skull; and Idvaluk, her leader, attacked him, being already raging in defence of Mary. Peter dealt somewhat firmly with the dog, and returned to her.

"How is this come about?" he asked in due course of time, and after he had shot two injured dogs for mercy.

She had travelled farther to the east, hoping there to find an easier way through the coastal barrier of ice. But she had not found a way, and had turned in this direction, so near to the coast that she could not reach; and then the blow had come . . .

Five nights we lay in the great north wind, he thought. And we did not know. And the dogs did not scent.

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Then the wind changed and fell, and hungry Nanuk came hunting down the wind, and took a dog. She wounded Nanuk, who became angry and killed other dogs and charged and struck Mary's rifle from her, and would have killed her but for the brave Idvaluk. Then Peter came.

Mary's eyes were downcast in the stillness of the moon. "You are truly a hunter now," she said.

Peter's heart beat loud with joy, but he said, "We have lost seven dogs, and we have lost our mud, and we are already heavy-laden. We must skin these dogs, and also Nanuk before he freezes." So they skinned Nanuk, who was a big male bear.

The old people, Peter wondered; but this was not a question to be asked. Mary paused a moment, plunging her cold hand into the still-warm guts of Nanuk.

"First, my grandfather died of a sudden pain," she said, touching her heart with the other hand. "She did not wish to live without him. Therefore, while I was absent on my trapline, she went and sat beside him in the snow."

Nanuk was skinned, and day was coming. "I will fetch my dogs," said Peter. He scouted a way to bring his team; struck camp, hitched them, and came slowly. He had thought of a great idea that was a small chance only, but it was a chance.

"Now," he said, with Mary again, "we will give the dogs a small feed for strength, and ourselves also, and then we will travel."

"There is no urgency," she said. "There is much meat. We should feast."

"Later we will feast," he said. "Besides," he said, not unmindful of words that she once had spoken, "too many feasts make no feasts."

They and the dogs fed lightly off Nanuk. Peter took some of her load, for Mary was carrying a whole year's catch of fur; and then it was time to hitch her dogs. He gave her a pair of his; there was some fighting between the strangers. Only Idvaluk, the leader, remained to be harnessed. Peter went for him.

"Oh Peter!" He turned.

"Take care he does not bite you." Mary laughed in the morning sun, and with such sweetness and laughing beauty that Peter felt faint, even as a man might feel at the sight of Nanuk.

But Idvaluk did not bite him. He laid his head with love against Peter, and Peter cuffed him heartily to say, My friend.

It was hard going to the shore, but with two pairs of eyes and two pairs of hands they made their way; and then they turned west to round the cape where ravens croak. Peter drove his dogs hard. "Hurry!" he called back to Mary, who was lagging.

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When she came up, he took her hatchet and broke his wooden grub-box into slivers and stowed them in his load.

"Hurry!" she said crossly. "Break grub-box! We are too late for Easter. What is this foolishness?"

"It is not foolishness," he said. "And there is hurry." He listened always, and heard nothing.

"You are foolish," Mary said. Are they not strange, he thought; what man would so lightly call another foolish?

"And you are wise," he said, and saw her face crumple unwillingly to delight. Her face was brown from the sun of spring, and her cheeks were red as Dew-Line apples.

They rounded the cape, and Peter picked up the foxes he had cached, and they travelled south-east now, but home was far at this speed of travel. He found his familiar lead, so smoothly iced that even on steel and heavily laden and with few dogs, they could ride the sleds. Peter watched the sky. There were mares'-tails, white and wispy, all over the sky; but a rim of blue showed low in the west. It grew and grew, pushing the mares'-tails over the sky, as if God's hand peeled off the sky to blue.

"Why do you always watch the west?" she called across. "What are these secrets?"

"I watch the sky. Is it not beautiful, and a secret?"

"There is sky every day," said Mary on his other side.

Was that—could it be? It was, indeed. "Whoa!" he called, and put down the anchor and ran to build and light his grub-box fire. And for this reason: Okpik had been due from the west by air on the day before Good Friday. Peter knew that. But he had forgotten that it was blowing on that day, and had been blowing ever since. And this was Peter's fine idea: that Okpik, being Okpik, would be sure to come, even five days late; only he would not tarry long; and planes from the west flew this way always to make landfall at the cape where ravens croak; then to follow the coast along.

The fire was burning strongly. He added fat for plentiful smoke. The plane flew low. Peter danced about and waved his hands in great despair.

"We are not sick," she said. "We do not need help. Are you mad, then?"

But he paid no heed. The plane circled once, and landed on this lead. The propeller stopped. A man stepped down. He was a man of such appearance that none would mistake him ever.

"Okpik!" Mary cried, and ran to him, for she thought of Okpik as a father, having had no father of her own since infancy.

There was a pilot, too, a stocky fellow. Greetings were exchanged.

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Okpik looked at Peter and Mary and at the teams. " Is there trouble? " he asked.

" No," said Peter. I am a man, he thought, not to be fearful, like a boy, with this old man.

" There was trouble," Mary said. She told the story of Nanuk.

" The hunter! " Okpik said. He put his arm across Peter's shoulder, and asked, smiling slyly, " Is there trouble now? "

" There is no trouble," Peter said, and suddenly his childish fear of Okpik left him, " except about marriage with this girl."

" Marriage! " Mary stamped her sealskin boot. " I have not agreed to marriage."

" So you do not want to marry him? " said Okpik.

Mary was shy again, and looked down at the smooth snow of the lead, and said in a soft small voice, wrinkling her brow in a certain way, " He is so foolish: but, yes, I want to marry him."

Peter drew the wallet from beneath his deerskins, and he opened it, and took the golden ring that he had kept so long.

" Who giveth this woman to be married to this man? "

The pilot gave Mary. She said, after Okpik, in the language of the People: " . . . for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part . . ."

And Peter said: " With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my wordly goods I thee endow . . ."

Thus Peter and Mary were married in the sun's warmth on the cold white sea, and Okpik prayed for them and for their children, and for all the People, that the People might come to new ways and yet not lose the old ways that had been their strength, and Okpik asked God's blessing on them.

The pilot kissed the bride according to the White Man's custom, and because she was comely, and he a man like any man.

" There is a message," Okpik said. " The building work is now almost done, but there will be flying always to and fro, and snow to be pushed. Therefore, they have permanent need for a cat-skinner of the People. They ask if you will go."

Peter thought of his mighty " Cat," and his heart, so full of joy already, bounded mightily, and he was surprised, thinking that Okpik was the enemy of " Cats." But then he remembered Mary, and he looked at her. " To skin the ' Cat,' " she murmured. " This would please you. Also, I would like to see such a great snow-pushing ' Cat.' " Mary smiled at him without any shyness. " Also, I am now your wife."

And now farewells were said, and Okpik and his pilot climbed aboard, and the plane roared away.

They watched until the last small speck was gone. The sky

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was blue. There was no touch of wind. The sun was strong on this first day after Easter; the dark fur of the deerskin was warm beneath the hand. "Spring comes," he said, and turned from his bride in happiness, and went over to his sled where the dogs lay, watching him.

"What now?" she called. "Is there hurry yet again?"

"To make camp," he said. "Here we will tie the dogs—and here. And there we will pitch the tent."

He looked for approval.

But Mary wrinkled her nose in the way that means No.

"A tent is cold," she said. "We will make a snow-house."

"You will help me?" Peter asked, for he was not expert in this skill, using always the quick, easy, modern, yet colder tent.

So they tied out the dogs, and then Mary found a drift of the same right firmness through and through, and Peter cut blocks, and Mary pared deftly with her snow-knife and fitted them, and Peter chinked the cracks; and then, from within, she placed the last roof block, or the cornerstone, of their marriage house, and crawled outside and said to him, "Do you remember the golden watch that should run for ever by itself without attention?"

"I remember," Peter said.

"I have worn it always in my bosom, and it does not run. Could the watch of gold have been broken in the throwing?"

"*Nau-na*," he said. I do not know. The memory of his anger was a small dark cloud.

Mary pulled a thong up from her neck and over her head beneath her hood, and she drew forth the golden watch from its resting-place and gave it to him.

Peter looked; then he listened to a soft and busy tick; then he held it to her ear that she might listen also. "It is a miracle," she cried. "It runs again, this precious thing."

Peter looked at the sun. He turned the hands to meet together at the hour of noon, and he took off her mitt, and slipped the golden strap onto her wrist, and said, "This is the rightful place, for such a watch takes strength from the movements of the arm; only thus will it run for ever by itself without attention. And yet it came ticking from your bosom. I do not understand this mystery."

And Mary laughed, and their hearts beat strong with love, which is a mystery, both new and old.

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BEYOND THE PALE

Nothing makes a child so ill-behaved as belonging to a neighbour.

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MORE THAN KIND

What sort of welcome could he expect from these savages?

BY EDWARD HYAMS

EDWARD BRANDEL told me this story at a friend's house. He was solemnly drunk, but none the less credible.

Brandel's an aviator employed by a firm of aircraft manufacturers. We've known each other for years, but I've never really understood him, perhaps because he himself has the air of understanding nothing and nobody. He has a manner, not exactly puzzled but, as it were, for ever surprised at finding life what it is. He lives by himself, without close friends, in a flat of depressing tidiness containing an enormous number of books, all of poetry. We met after he had written to me in appreciation of an essay I had published in praise of Saint-Exupéry, the only man of whom I ever heard him speak with warmth.

On that occasion, I mean at our friend's house, he turned his thin, pale face to me, his watered blue eyes hazy with drink, and said he had just returned from South America where he had been all but eaten by cannibals. I said I was glad to hear it, referring to his escape.

For a moment he looked at me doubtfully; then he said, "These cannibals were great animal lovers."

I waited for an explanation, but then he made a fresh start, telling me about a Senhor Camoens, a Brazilian millionaire with vast property in the Guiana highlands of Venezuela, and a customer of his firm. This gentleman had ordered an aircraft in which he planned to fly from point to point of his ranches. The machine was sent by sea as far as Para, Brandel accompanying it, as he was to fly it thence to its destination. He said, "I was warned—about the forest people, you know. They told me that if I were forced down among them, I should be either hopelessly lost, or perhaps eaten."

He had been told that the forest people were primitive, naked, armed with wood and bone, killing strangers, not in malice, but in the bestial fear and stupidity of the primeval.

"Primal idiocy," he went on dreamily, "killing with almost the maddening indifference of an elm that drops a great bough

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on a man, even on a windless day." He added that he was not afraid of that, because it was unreal to him. "How," he said, "could a man be as cruel as a tree? But I had a worse thought. You remember the man in Evelyn Waugh's book, kept eternally reading Dickens aloud in the jungle? I can think of no more terrible end to a story."

"But not perhaps very probable," I suggested.

He thought that over and said, "But something like it. Besides, Waugh thought of it, so why not?"

"At all events, these people kill and eat strangers?" I prompted him, for he seemed to grow sleepy.

He amended that: "*Occasionally*, they eat them."

And I, willing to be liberal even in considering such disagreeable customs, said, "Ritually, no doubt?"

Brandel frowned impatiently and said, "They just eat them."

He became animated again, asking me if I had ever read Garcilasso, Markham, Koch-Grünberg. In one of these authors he had read of the horror among the officers of an Inca army who had penetrated these same forests from the West, and found cannibals whose excuse for their gastronomic uncouthness was mere economy.

"And the carcasses of their butchered prisoners," Brandel said, "were exposed in the village markets for sale to housewives"—he slewed his lean body round to face me, for emphasis—"by the pound."

More calmly, he exposed his theory that these economical anthropophages were doubtless ancestors of the people over whom he, Brandel, had been flying. He went on to speak of the long flight, of how, fascinated by the endless tableland of foliage, of trees seen from the wrong point of view, he had sacrificed the safety of great altitude, after the forest had begun to slope upwards with the foothills, and how he had swung down to meet it, to skim the treetops, to be caught, just as the trees were growing sparse and the pampas appearing, by a total engine failure at five hundred feet.

Long before his ears had grown accustomed to the silence, then to the sighing of the air through the idling propeller, Brandel had picked his landing-ground and turned his machine towards the clearing. "Only," he said, "there was a statue in the midst of it."

I repeated, surprised, "A statue?"

He went on, "To me, to any European, a stone or wooden figure carved in the round is a statue. It wasn't until my undercarriage had knocked the head off the thing, that I had time to find the right word, the un-European word, and to be terrified.

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It was, I supposed, an idol. What sort of a welcome could I expect at the hands of its sectaries? Religious people are so unreasonable.

" Still," he said, when he had mixed us a drink, " I was relieved not to be landing among the trees." He spoke with much feeling of the horror he felt at the indifference of vegetable creatures to human suffering. " When my mother died, I went out into our garden at Beckenham, and saw that the trees were fat and green and unchanged. It was an outrage! "

Yes, he was very glad not to be landing among the trees, even though there was the danger of the broken idol. " Only," he said, " it wasn't an idol. The people among whom I landed worshipped several musical instruments. That wooden figure was, in fact, just a statue."

I looked at him sharply when he spoke of musical instruments as the gods of these Indians. Brandel is not a whimsical man: surely he was not making a tiresomely oblique reference to some savage melomania that he had discovered and would now describe? He saw my suspicions and grinned, almost as if he were sober. " Look it up in the anthropologists," he said. " The voices of their gods sound in their horns and drums."

" And the idol, then? " I asked. " The statue? "

He said it was a likeness of the founder of the R.S.P.C.A. and added, " It was without merit as a work of art, of course. Upton-Baring made it, an amateur. He was the chief, the cacique of these people. A Rutland man."

Brandel found himself welcomed by a community of naked, gentle, handsome people governed, indeed, by this Upton-Baring, a name which may mean something to professional explorers, although for me it has no associations. That incongruous chieftain came, plump and red and bald, fussing out of a nearby hut of grass and banana leaves, as soon as Brandel's machine touched down. He tutted and nodded and blinked and was amazed over Brandel's explanations; waved aside, but rather peevishly as if with an effort of politeness, of ungracious forbearance, Brandel's apologies for breaking the statue.

" My people," Upton-Baring said, " will be sorry. But then, you know, we can mend it, we can put that head back. Oh yes, we can certainly do that."

Brandel imitated, convincingly, the fussy manner, the tuts and nods and pauses, the excessive intensity of attention that characterized Upton-Baring and, in some mysterious fashion, thrust back the jungle, the enormous grass, the banana palms, the copper, mongoloid faces of his people, and their unselfconscious nakedness. None of these exotic properties could maintain its claim

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to reality against Upton-Baring's manner, which invoked instead the bleak and muddy football field on a November day of lowering sky, or the bare, ill-furnished parish hall, with strong tea and weak theology.

"I recognized him at once, you know."

"Upton-Baring? You knew him?"

"The type, he was only that, I knew. He was a games master at a not very good public school, or a scoutmaster, fat knees beneath tight shorts, mustering small boys on a draughty railway station, or an active, bustling, essentially secular clergyman embarrassed by any reference to God. Oh yes, I knew him, the unanimal man—no longer a boy, yet not and never to be quite an adult—sexless, passionless, cheerful, and good."

But I gathered from Brandel's account of him that there was more than this to Upton-Baring. After all, his schoolboys, his wolf-cubs, were, in fact, a savage, superstitious and man-eating people from back beyond the Old Stone Age, who presumably were less tractable than the more usual charges of the "type" with whom Brandel identified his jungle host. Moreover, Upton-Baring was mad, splendidly mad in the sense that St. Francis Xavier was mad. If his immaturity, that sexlessness and want of passion Brandel described, forbade him to rise to the love of men, still his love of beasts was singular, excessive and, another mark of saintliness, free from the vitiating humour of rational intellects. The erection of the statue, there in the Guiana highlands and for the edification of savages, makes that clear. It was an act of faith.

It was typical of Brandel that he saw little and said less of the savages. Savages did not interest him, he was incapable of absorption in the elaborate refinements of totem and taboo. What he liked in civilization, its essence for him, was simplicity, the anarchy of liberty and loneliness. The numerous rules of the complex and obscure communism characteristic of primitives were distasteful to him.

He did, indeed, show some interest in their music, their midnight concerts of strange and ancient instruments, from even the sight of which the women of the tribe were excluded, but whose sounds they could hear, the voices of gods and spirits, speaking, always nocturnally, to their menfolk. But even this divinely inspired cacophony repelled him, was painful to his ear and disgusting to his intelligence.

He was more interested in the astonishing reform wrought by Upton-Baring in the matter of the treatment of animals. The explorer had, in fact, reduced the people, by the force of his will, to a diet of manioc, bananas, and fish. "For some reason,"

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Brandel said, " he excluded fish from that mercy he extended to the rest of the animal creation, excepting, perhaps, man."

Upton-Baring had not, of course, convinced the savages of the evil of cruelty, the horror of their rough and fearful traps, and of their bestial indifference to animal pain. He had bullied them into obeying his injunctions with all the overwhelming virtue of his own righteousness. He had been practical, too; there was the statue, a symbol of his injunctions, a visible mnemonic. And his power over the savage mind derived not only from his goodness, but from his great secrets and his riches.

He commanded resources they could not understand; he dispensed hundreds of yards of the red cottons and rayons they adored and coveted, not to speak of tools of steel, harder and sharper than anything they had imagined. Moreover, his drugs were consistently successful in curing their sick.

Brandel said that a message about the spare part he needed for the aircraft was sent by a runner, who might take two, perhaps three weeks to arrive at the coast.

He passed the time in fly-fishing. I asked where he found the gear and game for this sport. As to the gear, Upton-Baring lent it, the finest of its kind, for the explorer himself had a passion for fly-fishing that might explain his cruelty to fish. As for the game, in the highland streams there were rainbows running up to ten pounds, like the great trout of New Zealand.

Brandel fished all day, only occasionally going among the savages, as when Upton-Baring invited him to witness an initiation ceremony. The boy candidates went through some senseless rigmarole, which included tearing apart and eating a simulacrum of an armadillo made of manioc flour bound with some edible gum. Formerly, until Upton-Baring had succeeded in substituting this vegetable symbol, a living armadillo had been used, had been rent and eaten almost alive.

One evening, while Brandel sat on beside a stream after the fish had ceased to rise, bored in that wilderness that he could not long pretend much resembled the lovely and artificial European scene, he happened to notice that the flies got no respite, despite the satiation or indolence of the fish. For, as darkness approached rapidly in those low latitudes, there came from all sides great numbers of bats, who hawked for flies just above the water.

" These bats," Brandel said, " were not the great or small vampires of the country, but much like our own, small, grotesque, and inaudibly shrill. I watched them, very quick and not ungraceful, as they hawked over the still reach of the stream. And, in the cruelty of faint melancholy and of idleness, it came into my mind that I might catch a bat with a fly, as I did trout."

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It was a queer notion, yet it somehow suited him, I thought. Certainly, he would never be brutally indifferent to suffering but might, on occasion, be cruel for his own cool pleasure.

He said, "I began to cast and several times bats swooped on my fly, but each time sheered off as if they detected a fraud. Then, about the tenth cast, a bat took the fly when it was in the air in the middle of my cast. I cannot, as a rule, hear the cry of a bat, but this one screamed audibly as I struck. It kept on the wing as I reeled in the line, holding the line, fantastically, parallel to the ground. Then the little beast lost its balance in the air and fell, and I dragged it to me, waddling and flapping. I took it in my hand to disengage the hook. It felt like a purse warm from the pocket but pulsing . . . a purse with a heart filling it.

"I stood there holding it, disgusted by the blood that came from its mouth, and a moment later I was down in the mud, fighting for my life with two naked savages. At first, instinctively, I fought back, but when I came to my senses, I stayed still and let them bind me. They carried me to the men's long house, and flung me down there. It was an hour before Upton-Baring came."

It seems that Upton-Baring was now a very different man from the stout, genial scoutmasterly fellow who had played host to Brandel in his outlandish house. He was white, he sweated, he spoke curtly and with difficulty, and all this because of the cold rage that possessed him. He accused Brandel of wanton cruelty to the bat, for his savages had reported to him what they had seen.

Brandel, unable to suppose that Upton-Baring would refuse him help, objected mildly that his cruelty had not been wanton, but thoughtless. "I was bored," he said, "and surely you, as a fly-fisherman, can see how, once I had a notion to take a bat with a fly, I had to try it?"

But his defence made no impression. "Cruelty to animals," Upton-Baring said, "is the crime I can never forgive. Never!" He spoke with cold passion, and for the first time Brandel was afraid. He knew, suddenly, that he had no means of communication with this eccentric, this fanatic.

He asked what would happen to him. "Do you mean to punish me?" he asked.

"I shall leave you," Upton-Baring replied, "to my people. They will deal with you according to their traditions."

"And what," Brandel had asked, "is entailed in this regard for ancient customs?"

To that, Upton-Baring replied with a cool, deliberate ferocity that the savages would cut open their victim with a stone knife, tear out his living heart as an offering to the gods, and then, when he was dead, dismember, cook, and eat him.

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Upton-Baring spoke in a manner that left no doubt that he spoke the truth, and he would do nothing to help his guest.

"An hour later," Brandel said, "an aircraft arrived from the coast, with my spare part. Upton-Baring saw it coming, and came to release me, silent, sullen, and unforgiving."

Brandel told me no more until I, wanting a tidier end to his story, said, "So, but for that, you'd have been eaten?"

"I dare say," he replied. "I don't know. I had one other argument that I intended to try on Upton-Baring, who was, I think, a very just man.

"I thought of reminding him that man also is an animal."

SOLUTIONS to BLUE MOON on page 38

1. *a. H. de Vere Stacpoole; b. Johann Strauss, the younger; c. Gainsborough; d. Maurice Maeterlinck*
2. *No; yes; only according to Kipling; yes there is, it's a kind of gannet!* 3. *Barry Cornwall, 1787*
4. *Danish cheese, akin to Roquefort; gin*
5. *Frank L. Stanton; George Gershwin; Leroy Anderson*
6. *Harebells, wild campanula,* not *bluebells, which are wild hyacinths.* 7. *Kentucky*

IN NEXT MONTH'S

ARGOSY

BERKELY MATHER's gripping new adventure. Geth Straker finds himself involved in the biggest gamble of his life—a gamble for money, for love, for freedom

ISAK DINESEN's poignant haunting love story—a brilliant tale you will remember all your life

ARTHUR GORDON a new spell-binder, of a man who knew how to play his cards

Also MICHAEL GILBERT's exciting new mystery

You must not miss next month's

ARGOSY

on sale February 7

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AND SO TO BED

Spring! Spring! Hey ding a ding a ding,
Now is the time for readers to take up gardening.
No more sitting with toes in the fender,
Here is your next month's horticultural agenda.
Order seed-potatoes suitable for your area
Unless of course you live in a swamp
in which case you have malaria,
Or on top of a gusher spouting crude oil
In which case you are a millionaire and not
interested in the soil.

Spike lawn with fork, sow first sweet peas
Sprinkle weathered soot round polyanthuses
(If you use electric heating, beg soot from all
possible sources)
When you have finished with this copy of Argosy
why not pass it on to a member of H. M. Forces?

To discourage fly, sow little clumps of parsley;
Mem: don't give your lettuces fresh manure or they
will have no hearts, which is gharsley.
Now's the time to start saving milk-bottle tops
They don't scare the birds but they're cheaper
than the things you buy in the shops.

Carefully rake seedbed, removing stones
It should have been treated with wood-ash, manure,
chopped straw, and 2 oz. crushed bones.
If you haven't any bones, better buy some,
Murders lead to trouble, we don't advise 'em.

Now (and if you've planted alpines, sowed every suitable seed
And divided your border pinks) there's time for a nice read.
This month's Argosy, as usual well up to the mark'll
Be found packed with sense, suspense, high spirits,
and stories with a sparkle.

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PHANTOM MURDER

Quickly like a lizard
he slid into the shelter of the vine

BY R. A. DICK

THE November sun seemed to be waging war against the African earth, sucking out its moisture, trying to suffocate all that breathed with fierce, relentless strength; even the shelter of man-made roofs became no more than a trap to catch and hold the merciless heat.

Biti Mkandwa put down her heavy, charcoal-filled iron with a sigh of relief, and placed the last of the District Commissioner's clean laundry in the basket at her side. She had risen at cock-crow to beat, scrub, and rinse that laundry in the stream, as Adam, her late husband who had been the Bwana's head boy, had taught her. The washing had dried rapidly in the scorching sun. She had been ironing since before midday. In the cool of the evening, she would walk the three miles to the Bwana's house, in the town, with her basket. Covering it with a white cloth, she moved to the window.

Her son, Ben, was still sitting there on the broken step of the little verandah, leaning back against one of the brick pillars that supported the corrugated iron roof, half hidden by the golden-rain vine Adam had planted, and which grew now like a flaming curtain over the small house, screening anyone on the verandah from prying eyes. Her son sat there, his feet in their yellow pointed shoes turned in, his great hands dangling over his knees, his mouth hanging open, as if he were too lazy to draw breath.

He was staring in front of him. Biti knew that he was not looking at the parched land, but into some strange and impossible future in which the African people ruled the earth, yet did no work on it. Not that he worked as it was, thought Biti, for since the death of her husband, four years ago, she had supported herself and her son by washing for the Bwana's household.

After leaving school, Ben had spent all his days, and many of his nights, with that evil young man, Chikuti, until Chikuti had been caught robbing a store, and had been sent to gaol a fortnight

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ago, by the Bwana D.C. Now Ben scarcely left the house, and never until after nightfall. All day he sat on the verandah step, and raised not a finger to help her. She had had to clear her garden herself, ready for planting in the approaching rains.

Glancing back at the table, she sighed deeply. The shirt she had washed for him that morning was waiting to be ironed. He did nothing, even for himself. Perhaps it would have been better if he had not stayed so long at school; but Adam had been ambitious for their son. He had wanted Ben to be a clerk, and wear a white uniform; he had wanted him to be a Christian and wear a white spirit; yet a better man than Adam himself had never lived, and he had had no schooling. How was it possible for so good a man to have fathered so worthless a son, she asked herself, not for the first time.

Not that she would allow anyone but herself to say a word against Ben. She told her neighbours in the village that he had a weakness and could do no work. Only she knew that the weakness was in his spirit, not in his flesh; and that *was* his trouble. He had been weak, not bad, until he met Chikuti, that evil Chikuti, who had been deported from Hallele, where he had been working in the copper mines, and who had returned to the village to dazzle the weak and foolish, with his purple suit and white cap, his red tie, and yellow shoes.

The sound of an approaching car purred out of the distance. Was someone dying in the village? It was seldom that anyone but the doctor drove out this way. Looking out of the window, she saw Ben jump to his feet. How quickly he had moved, like a lizard, sliding deeper into the shelter of the screening vine.

The car came over the brow of the hill. It was not the doctor's gharry-moto. This grey one belonged to the District Commissioner. She had seen it many times outside his house. Why was the Bwana coming to their village? The gharry-moto was drawing up. The Bwana must be coming to see her! He had never been before. How glad she was that Adam had built her a house, like a clerk's house. She would have been ashamed to receive the Bwana in a windowless hut like her neighbour's. The Bwana was alone in his gharry-moto. He was getting out . . .

The revolver shot ripped through the stagnant air, cleaving the silence into sharp, whining echoes, that beat back again and again from the opposite hill, filling Biti's senses with terror, driving her from the window in quivering dread.

The door opened. Ben slid into the house. He had a revolver in his hand. His skin had a grey look, like the skin of a blemished black grape, his staring eyes showed circling whites, he struggled

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for breath as if he had been a spent runner. The smell of fear came in with him, rank and evil, overpowering the sweet, pure scent of the freshly-ironed linen. As he came towards her, his mouth mumbled words she was afraid to hear.

Turning from him to the window, she gave a sudden cry of thanksgiving.

The Bwana was standing by his car, bareheaded but unhurt. As she looked he stooped and, lifting his white topi from the ground, shook the red dust from it.

Now her only thought was to save her son. Snatching the revolver from him, she thrust it deep into her basket, and swung it up on his head. Supporting it there, she raised his trembling right hand and placed it firmly on the hard rim of the basket.

" Hold fast . . . say nothing . . . not a word," she hissed, and went out. The uncertain planks of the verandah steps sagged, groaning under her heavy hurrying tread, as she went down to meet the white man.

" Morny, Bwana," she cried, " morny."

He turned and looked at her without speaking. The glance of his grey eyes seemed to bore through her own dark ones to the black secret in her mind. Gathering all her strength, she forced herself not to lower her gaze, to give him back honest look for honest look.

" Morny, Bwana," she said again, " I hope that you are well."

The village street had been empty in the heat of the day, but the sound of the shot had brought the people from their huts. They stood at a distance, staring in fearful silence, stirring up dust and debris with uneasy, shuffling feet.

Katuli, the old headman, came more slowly from his house. " Morny, Bwana," he greeted the District Commissioner. " That was a strange sound which disturbed me as I rested in my house. ' What is this sound which has disturbed me? ' I have asked my wife, and she has risen and, looking through the doorway, has said, ' The Bwana has come to our village in his gharry-moto.' ' Perhaps it is the engine of the Bwana's gharry-moto, which has made this sound, ' I have said."

" Perhaps."

The Commissioner settled his topi on his head as he spoke. In the side of the topi facing Biti, she could see a small hole at the top, beyond the level of the covered head. If the hole had been only a very little lower, thought Biti, fingering her mouth to hide the trembling of her lips.

" My wife is a foolish woman," went on old Katuli. " She said to me, ' Your ears no longer hear the truth. This is a gun, this sound which we have heard.' ' Who can fire a gun in my village,

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foolish one?' I have answered her, 'only the headman may own a gun, and am I, Katuli, not the headman, and is my gun not in its place? No,' I have said, 'this sound is from the engine of the Bwana's gharry-moto. I have heard just such a sound made by a gharry-moto in the town.' And it is true indeed Bwana, but Lunga of the P.W.D. has told me that this sound is not a gun, but the engine of the gharry-moto, which fires backwards."

"Your village needs sweeping, Katuli," said the D.C.

"I am not expecting the Bwana to visit," replied the old man reproachfully.

"And get rid of those broken gourds," continued the D.C., "they will collect rain in which mosquitoes may breed, when the rains come. See to it."

"Yes, Bwana, it shall be done," promised the headman.

"May I come into your house, Biti Mkandwa?" said the Commissioner, turning to her.

"Yes, Bwana, yes indeed," she replied, scarcely hesitating. "Come and rest in my house, for the sun is hot where there is no shade."

Stumbling a little, she led the way up the steps and stood aside to let the District Commissioner enter the dwelling first. Following him in, she shut the door. In her sun-dimmed sight, Ben seemed no more than a shadow in darker shadows standing there as she had left him, holding the basket of washing on his head with his killer's hand.

"My son was even now on his way to your house with your laundry, Bwana," she said. "One white sock was missing, and a button hangs by a thread on your khaki shirt. Sit now, Bwana, and I shall fetch you water that you may drink and refresh yourself in my house."

She pulled up a stool as she spoke, but the Bwana did not sit down. Taking off his topi, he put it on the table. There was a second hole opposite the first, black against the whiteness of the topi, staring at her like an accusing eye.

Putting a hand into the breast pocket of his white suit, the Bwana pulled out a pink envelope. With a fresh quiver of fear, Biti recognized it as belonging to the writing material she had bought four years ago, on which to tell Adam's brother in Hallele the news of Adam's death. Ben had been out last night, she remembered, long enough to walk to the boma with a letter.

The Commissioner took a sheet of paper out of the envelope. "I found this letter from you this morning, Biti Mkandwa," he said. "It was lying on my doorstep under a stone. The letter asks me to come and see you, telling me you are in very great trouble."

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And was that not true, thought Biti, her brain spinning as if she were a spider weaving a web, a web to trap the danger threatening her son.

" Did you in fact write me this letter, Biti Mkandwa? " asked the D.C.

" No, Bwana," she replied quickly, for this was a truth she could admit without hesitation. " Ben is writing all my letters, for I have had no schooling."

" I see," said the District Commissioner and went on, " I was sorry to hear that you were in trouble. Your husband served me faithfully and well for many years; indeed, when I fell ill with blackwater fever on safari far from help, it was Adam's care that saved my life. One does not forget such a man. So when I read your letter I said, ' I shall go myself to see how I may help Adam's wife, who serves me loyally too in her own way.' "

A just man, a kind man. And her own son had tried to kill him. Anger swelled in her throat, choking her, as she answered, " Yes, Bwana. Adam told me of this trouble that befell you."

" As you will tell me of your trouble," said the D.C.

Spinning, spinning, spinning . . . holes in the web for danger to fly through . . . holes in the Bwana's topi for death to fly through —yet he had escaped death. Perhaps he had not seen the holes. Perhaps he had not seen Ben with the gun in his hand. Perhaps he believed as Katuli did, that no shot had been fired.

" I am waiting for your answer, Biti," said the D.C. " What is your trouble? "

What answer could she give? Hanging her head, she stood silent, twisting and turning her fingers.

The D.C. turned and spoke to Ben. " You are a friend of Chikuti's," he said.

Ben shook his head. Clutching the basket, with both hands now, he shook his head slowly, sullenly.

" I heard that you were," said the D.C.

Like a pendulum, Ben's head swung heavily, to and fro, denying his friend.

And suddenly Biti's web took shape.

" My son is afraid of this evil man," she said, raising her glance. " He has been hiding here in my house for fear of him. That is my trouble, that this Chikuti will seek out my son and force him into his own wicked ways. I said, ' I shall write to the Bwana, who is my father and my mother, to ask his help in keeping my son from this Chikuti devil. Yes, I shall ask the Bwana to come to my very house, so that no other shall hear what I have to tell; ' for my heart is sad and there is great shame in my heart, that my son should have such fear that he does not walk

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abroad in the light of day, but creeps out in the night as if he were a hyena, for fear of Chikuti."

"Have you not heard that I have sent Chikuti to prison?" asked the D.C.

"Who am I to be told such things?" replied Biti. "And how may my son hear the news of the town, when he bars the door if men come near our house and hides himself from all eyes?"

"Yet he was not hiding when I came," said the D.C., "and it seems that he is about to walk abroad in daylight, burdened like a woman, without fear of men!"

"Greater is his fear to stay alone in the house," answered Biti, "therefore he comes with me to the boma, and since he comes he is offering to carry the basket for me, for he is a good son, and though men may mock him because he walks like a woman, with a basket of washing on his head, yet he heeds not their scorn, thinking of his mother before himself."

Tears came to her eyes as she spoke. She was describing Adam. She was describing the son he should have given her.

Rubbing the back of her hand across her eyes, she sniffed fiercely; ashamed of her weakness in front of the Bwana.

He was looking about the house now, his glance searching here and there, travelling swiftly over the table where Ben's shirt lay waiting to be ironed, passing over the grass mats, the cooking-pots, resting on the padlocked tin trunk in the corner in which she kept her small hoard of savings and her few garments against the ravages of the white ants; passing on to Ben, as he stood there in his khaki shorts and soiled green shirt.

"Where is the gun?" asked the D.C. abruptly.

Now Ben's head was still, his whole body stilled by fear into the dead statue of a man.

"My son has no gun," cried Biti shrilly. "He has always had great dread of shooting. When he was a child we have taken him to the boma on the King's Birthday when there were fireworks. One has made the noise of a gun close to us, so that he thought we were all killed, and from that time he has had great dread of guns. Moreover Katuli has told the truth, there are no guns but Katuli's gun in this village. That sound the Bwana has heard was, indeed, from the engine of his own gharry-moto."

The D.C. turned away to the window. He remained there with his back to Biti and her son, looking out at the crowd about his car. The sound of voices stirred the air like the buzzing of honey-seeking bees. The Bwana stood there so long in silence, that it seemed as if he, too, had been turned into a statue. Biti felt herself to be all that lived in the close little house. When he spoke at last, she gave a cry, as if a stone image had come to life.

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" It is not fitting that a grown man should be afraid of men or guns," he said, without turning. " In the army, men are taught courage against the enemy and skill with weapons, under the law. It would be better if Ben were to enlist and learn such things. It would be safer for Ben, in many ways, if he were to become a soldier."

There was more than advice in the last words. Was it a warning to Ben, Biti wondered, that it would be better for him to keep far from Chikuti, even a gaoled Chikuti?

" I shall be passing the barracks on my way home," went on the D.C., moving from the window to face Biti and her son.

" I shall tell them there to expect a new recruit before the sunset bugle." A faint smile flickered across his stern face. " And since the sun is hot, and that basket heavy," he added, " I shall take it with me in my car, to save your feet from walking to my house."

The gun! He would find the gun in the basket and know the truth, thought Biti, her flesh rigid with despair and defeat.

Helplessly she stared from the basket to the D.C. He was looking intently at her and suddenly she realized, as clearly as if he were speaking to her with his lips, that he already knew the truth. That, since only his own life had been endangered, he was giving Ben another chance, not for his sake but for Adam's, who had saved that life so long ago.

" May you rest well, Biti Mkandwa," said the D.C. He moved to the door. " Bring the basket," he said.

" Yes, Bwana," she answered, and, seizing it from Ben's clutching hands, she followed the Commissioner out of her house and down the steps to his car.

" Go well, Bwana," she cried after him, as he drove away, " Go well, indeed."

Ben was kneeling by the tin trunk in the corner, when she returned. " Give me the key," he said, breathlessly, " give me the key that I may take the money you have hidden, and escape to Hallele."

" I shall give you no key," she replied.

He sprang up and faced her, his hands shaking with the violence that was in him, his eyes glaring at her in hatred, as if he were Chikuti himself. As she looked at him, great anger rose in her, beating like a war-drum in her heart, for it seemed to her as if Chikuti had spirited away her son and left this cruel stranger in his place. " I shall give you no key and no money," she cried. " You are not my son.

" Yet you lied to save me," he said, retreating a little before the fierce fire of her wrath.

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"I lied, but it was the Bwana who saved you," she said "The Bwana has keen eyes and ears. We have not deceived him. He knows the truth, yet he has let you go free; but I shall not spare you. If you will not do as he has said, I will cry out the truth for all men to hear and know your shame that you have tried to kill this just man, who has been your father's Bwana and loyal friend."

For a moment he stood there, death towards her in his heart; but she faced him implacably, looking into his eyes without fear, without love, and suddenly he sank down on the stool. Bowing his head in his hands, he wept.

"Amai, amai!" he sobbed, as if he had been a child.

Relief flowed through her, and with it peace. Moving forward to the table, she lifted the heavy iron.

"You will put on your clean shirt to go to the barracks," she said.

Swinging the iron to and fro, she fanned the greying charcoal to glowing life.

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A FRIEND FOR SAMSON

Anyone could come and watch the lion feeding

BY WALTER MACKEN

TIM stood patiently at the edge of the small crowd and waited for the appearance of the man he called Putrid in his mind.

He was a young boy. His thin hands were clasped behind his back. He wore short trousers, neatly patched, and a red jersey. He wore no shoes or socks. Anyway it was summer-time and the dust of the place was warm under his bare feet.

This was the third day he had come to watch the feeding of the animals of the circus. It wasn't a big circus. The main tent was only medium size. The garish signs were mottled from the weather. The caravans looked tawdry in the light of day.

Tim hadn't been inside to see the circus. He could never raise the price of it, even the matinée, but he came faithfully, and watched the feeding and then stood hopefully outside the tent. But no kind person had as yet cast an eye on him and offered to take him in. The overworked hands just shooed at him if he got in their way. But the feeding of the animals was free. Anybody could come and watch. It was a small menagerie. Just a lioness and a tiger and a few monkeys, and Samson.

Samson was the lion. It was near his cage Tim always stood. It wasn't a big cage. It barely fitted the body of the lion. Tim felt his own limbs cramped when he looked at the cage. Samson wasn't like a lion you would see in books or a picture. His mane was not bushy. It was nearly all worn away. There was only a bit of it left around his head, up near his ears. He didn't roar either. Even when he was provoked he would only loose off a half-hearted growl. You know the sort of small bush that a lion has near the end of his tail. Samson didn't have that either. It was worn away. His tail was mottled, sort of mean-looking. You could see his ribs too. He wasn't a fat lion.

Tim was very fond of Samson. He preferred him to the pacing tiger with the fearful eyes. He even preferred him to the monkeys, although the monkeys were good fun.

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The other children had run up to the far side of the field. There was Putrid coming out with the bucket. It was a bucket of meat. Raw meat. The sides of the bucket were stained with old blood and fresh blood. Tim felt the wave of dislike coming over him again at the sight of the man with the bucket.

He was a small man, very black-haired, always seeming to want a shave. He wore clothes that were too big for him; the trousers were in folds round his battered shoes. He wore a collar fastened with a tie-pin, which only creased the collar into still more dirty folds, and a string of a red tie that was greasy. He was carrying a pole in his hand with a steel prod on the end of it.

Tim felt the muscles of his stomach tightening at the sight of him. Always the same. Opening the slot in the cage of the tiger and the lioness and poking in the meat to them. He talked to those nicely enough always. They grabbed the meat and held it between their claws and squatted down to eat it. Then he turned his face towards the cage of Samson and went into his act.

Before he could start the act, Tim turned to Samson, and he said to him, " Don't mind him, Samson. Don't mind him. He is very ignorant." Samson may have heard him. He turned his head towards him and blinked his great eyes, and then went back to his dreaming. Almost against his will, Tim turned his eyes to watch Putrid.

There he was, several yards away, crouching like an ape, the bucket in one hand, the pole in the other. The kids were around him, laughing at his antics.

" Here's the fiercest one of them all, min," he was saying, pointing Samson with his nose, like a dog. " Fresh outa the jungles of Africa. Looka the red in his eyes. Watch the stretch of the claws. On'y to be approached with great caution. Careful with him now. He can stretch a limb five foot through the bars to get at ye."

He circled round as if he was stalking. Tim watched him in disgust. He knew that the best parts would be gone from the bucket. Samson never got anything from him but the bare leavings of the others.

The kids were delighted with Putrid. They started to imitate him, crouching and stalking and laughing. Suddenly Putrid darted towards the cage, inserted the prod, and stuck it in Samson's side. The lion moved, almost grunting. He couldn't move far. He didn't growl. He didn't roar. Tim would have given anything to hear him roaring with anger. He didn't.

" See that? " says Putrid. " Hear the roaring of him. Waken the dead, he would. Oh, a fierce, fierce animal, kids. But you don't have to be afraid of him. Watch this." He put down the

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bucket and the pole and he ran crouching behind the cage and caught hold of Samson's tail. He pulled it as hard as he could, so that the body of the lion was pulled back to the end bars.

"See that?" he was shouting. "The on'y fierce animal in captivity to be held be the tail. He'll go mad, so he will. Watch him tear the cage to pieces."

Tim's fingernails were biting into his palms. Samson rose almost wearily, straightening himself, crouching because he could not stand upright in the cage, pulling against the pull on his tail, almost staggering on his pads as Putrid suddenly released him. The lion's head hit the bars on the other side. He didn't object.

Because he's old, I suppose, Tim thought. He wouldn't have done that to him when he was young. He conjured up a picture of Samson meeting Putrid in a jungle clearing. Samson wouldn't be unkind then, Tim betted. He would just tear Putrid to pieces. Tim savoured that.

Putrid was rubbing his hands. "Nothin' to it, min," he was saying. "I've pulled lions be the tail in every continent in the world. But this one is real fierce when he's feedin'. Oh, real fierce when he's feedin'."

He didn't open the slot. He pulled the bar and opened the whole door of the cage. Tim wished that Samson would spring out on top of him. He didn't. Putrid hit him on the head with the prod. You could hear the sound of it. Samson just blinked his eyes and pulled back.

"No play in him at all today," said Putrid. "Here, Fanny, have your chips."

He up-ended the bucket and flung the contents of it straight into the lion's face. The lion must have looked funny with the things on his face.

The bystanders were dying laughing. The scraps fell off his face, then onto the floor of the cage.

Putrid banged the door and locked it.

"Bah," he said. "No play for him at all today. What a lion. Come on, we'll get to the monkeys."

They followed him. One of them, before going, tentatively took a pull at the lion's tail which was still hanging through the bars. He let it go quickly and ran after them shouting, "Hey, fellas, I did it. I pulled his tail."

Putrid patted him on the head.

"Man," he said, "you'll be a lion-tamer yet, so you will."

They laughed.

Tim was looking at Samson. "Maybe he doesn't mean it," he was saying to him. "But don't mind him. He has to die some time and then he won't be after you."

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He felt tears in his eyes. Because I'm young, he thought. Like you would cry about a drowning kitten.

Samson started to clean his face. It took him some time. Then he sniffed at the food between his paws. It didn't interest him. He lifted his head and looked away at the sky.

At that moment, Tim got the thought that maybe Samson was sick. He knew they didn't use him in the circus. Just the lioness and the tiger. They just carted him around to be a father, they said. And suddenly in his mind's eye he saw the wood outside the town. You came down a hill to it and climbed another hill out of it, and in the hollow there was a clear stream that babbled over stones, and the wood was wide and dappled with sunlight.

In a place like that Samson would be at home, with the birds and the trees and the bracken, and he would get well and growl and roar and nobody would disturb him, and Putrid couldn't torture him.

At this thought, Tim reached up—he had to stretch a lot—and he pulled back the steel bolt and he opened the door of the cage.

" Come on, Samson," he said, " I will take you to a place that you will like. It won't be like the jungle. But it'll be nearly as good. Come on! Please come on before anybody comes."

Samson didn't want to come.

Tim pulled himself up onto the floor of the cage until he was hanging on his chest. He stretched an arm until his hand could take hold of the remaining mane and he tugged at it gently.

" Come on, Samson," he said. " Come on."

Samson resisted, but then he started to go with the pull of the boy's hand. Tim got his feet on the ground. He still kept his grip on the old lion's mane. And then Samson crouched and sprang to the earth.

He stood there for a while, feeling the unaccustomed ground under his pads. Then he dutifully followed the pull of the small hand on his mane and walked beside him, past the caravans, out of the gate, and into the street of the town.

They walked calmly down the middle of the street.

Towns are quite used to odd things walking down their streets; people, contraptions, and even animals. Runaway horses are expected and frequently make heroes. Also elephants may walk down town streets as long as they are with circuses and are parading.

But this was a market-day in the town and the street was crowded, both sides of it taken up with motor vans and lorries and asses and carts and horses and carts, the owners all going

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about their lawful occasions. If you can ripple a pond with a pebble you can entirely upset it by throwing a large boulder into it. The pond will explode.

It was like that now with the town as the first person looked at the boy and the lion.

This was a fat woman with a shopping-basket. She looked and she looked again and then she dropped her basket and opened her mouth very wide and screamed and turned and ran screaming. Her legs were fat and her stockings didn't go all the way up on her legs so that when she ran men could see where they ended and were tied just above her knees with soiled red ribbon.

Everybody claimed afterwards that it was this woman who led to the unnatural panic with her screaming. Except for her, they said, nobody would have paid the least attention to the boy and the loose lion. Perhaps, but if you are walking up a street and you see a lion walking towards you, I doubt if you will stop to ask any questions. Your skin will crawl, your mouth will dry, the hair will rise on the back of your neck, and you will seek safety in flight. Everybody did that now.

The street, thronged with people, cleared as if a plague had swept through it. People ran into the first open shop door, fighting to get in and to bang the doors behind them, and peer out through the glass. Screaming women and shouting men, all panic-stricken. They ran into cars and closed the doors of them and shot up the windows of them, and peered palely through them. It was a shameful business but it must be recorded.

They left horses and donkeys where they were. If these animals were not tied to telegraph poles by the reins, they were disturbed and they took to their heels, dragging the heavy carts after them. There were many unknown heroes in outlying districts that day who never got medals for stopping runaway animals but that was just their bad luck.

Tim walked solemnly on, talking to Samson, almost unconscious of the confusion and upset he was leaving behind him. He turned from the busy shopping and market street into the wide square. This was roomier and people had more time to find safety and to reflect.

It was a Councillor who got the police on to it.

He, unfortunately, ended halfway up a pole, clinging to it by his hams. It wasn't widely known, but his wife spent some time afterwards pulling wooden chips from the inside of his thighs. It's not part of the story, but he was ever afterwards known as The Northerner, because he was the Councillor who was up the pole. Subtle but enraging.

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From his uncomfortable perch he addressed the people about how the bloody police were never where they were wanted, and then he shouted at a frightened citizen who was peering through a second-storey window to go and call the police for God's sake and tell them there was a lion loose in the town and not to be standing up there gawking like an eejit. The Councillor was mad, and no wonder, for he had to stay on the pole until somebody brought a ladder, because his position was painful, but he didn't want to get more chips in him than he had now, because, he shouted at an inquirer, if he got any more in him, he'd float.

So it was that Tim paused at the top of the square and became aware of all the disturbance he was causing and also became aware of the line of police gradually and very cautiously closing in on him. His hand tightened on Samson, and he stopped, and Samson stopped and looked at the circle of men approaching him. He raised a lip and snarled, and the advancing line came to a dead stop.

They had no arms, just their batons held in their hands, but most of them thought that a lion could have the juggler torn out of you before you could hit him, all except the Inspector, a tall man with blue eyes, who came close to the boy and the lion with nothing under his arm except a light cane.

He had sense. When he got the message he had called the circus people. Out of one corner of his eye he saw them approaching now, out of the street into the square, loaded with ropes and bars and hauling a cage on wheels which they lifted down from a van.

"Take it easy, boy," said the Inspector. "Don't get excited. Nothing will happen. Don't excite him."

Tim's mouth was dry. He was afraid of the police. Where Tim lived nobody much liked the police. They often called and politely removed sons of the people for various misdemeanours. Also he suddenly realized that his hopes were at an end. He hadn't thought of the town and the police. If he could have gone a back way, nobody might have noticed. Now, he thought sadly, Samson would never see the wood.

The Inspector was surprised as he closed on him. The boy had no fear, and as he looked closely at the lion, he saw there was no need for anybody to fear. All the same, who knew? The lion looked old and thin and helpless, but one slash at the boy was all that was needed.

The men were closing from behind, cautiously, the ropes held in loops.

"Leave the lion and come here to me," said the Inspector.

Tim shook his head.

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" No, no," he said, his small hand tightening on the lion.

" You'll have to let him go," said the Inspector. " The men are behind you. They are going to throw ropes over him. You'll have to come to me."

" Don't let Putrid touch him," said Tim.

The Inspector didn't know what he was talking about. " All right," he said.

" Good-bye, Samson," said Tim then, pressing his hand deeply into the lion's neck. He didn't look at him any more. He bent his head and walked to the Inspector.

The Inspector heaved a sigh and caught his hand. He watched for a short time as the ropes landed, and the lion was secured. Like a pent-up breath relieved, there was laughter and calling and shouting. He noticed the small black dirty little fellow cavorting round the lion as they put him into the cage. He went docilely, peacefully. But this chap was acting the mickey for the surrounding people. And they were laughing at his antics.

" All right," said the Inspector, " let's go down and get off the streets and see what this is all about."

Level-headed people who saw the whole thing said afterwards that it was a spectacle to see the boy and the lion frightening a whole town, and that it was as much a spectacle to see a tiny boy walking down to the police barracks surrounded by very tall men.

Tim felt that he was walking in a blue forest. All he could see was blue legs like the trunks of trees. But the hand of the Inspector was holding him gently, so he wasn't as frightened and his heart didn't thump as badly as before. Perhaps the Inspector sensed his awesome incipient fear, because Tim soon found himself alone in a small room with just a desk and a bright fire, and the Inspector, who didn't seem so tall when he was sitting down.

" Now, Tim," he said, " tell me. Did you open the cage? "

" Yes, sir," said Tim.

" Why? " he asked.

" I wanted to bring him out to the woods," Tim said. " So that he would get well, and Putrid wouldn't torture him."

" Who's Putrid? " the Inspector asked, " and how did he torture him? "

Tim told him about Putrid.

" I see," said the Inspector.

" Samson is not well," said Tim. " You should have seen him. He wouldn't roar nor nothing. And he should have. He should have eaten Putrid. But he didn't do nothing. Just sat when he stuck things into him and pulled his tail and everything. You see, Samson should be in the woods to get well."

" I see," said the Inspector. He took up the telephone and

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called a number into it. He tapped with a pencil on the desk as he waited. His eyes were hard. Tim was frightened again.

"That you, Joe?" he asked. "Yes, it's me. I want you down here in about ten minutes. Bring your bag of tricks with you. Yes, I'll explain to you then. It's urgent."

He put down the phone. He pressed a button and started to write on a sheet of paper. Another policeman came in.

"Here," he said. "Go to the J.P. down the road and get him to sign that." The policeman went.

"All right, Tim," said the Inspector. "Come on and we'll go out and wait for Joe."

"What are you going to do with me?" Tim asked. "Will I have to go to gaol?"

The Inspector looked at him for a moment, then put his hand on his head. "No, Tim," he said. "No gaol. On the other hand, no medal either. They don't give out medals for the kind of good deed you do. Come on." He took his hand again and walked with him down the corridor, out into the sunshine.

There were men with their coats off and wearing gym shoes playing in the sunlight. They stopped and looked for a time until they heard the car horn honking. Then they went out. The Inspector opened the door of the car and put Tim in before him. There was a bulky red-faced man behind the wheel.

"Hullo, Joe," said the Inspector. "This is Tim, a friend of mine."

"Hullo, Tim," said Joe. "Glad the Inspector has decent friends for a change."

The policeman came then, breathless, shoved in the paper through the window.

"He made no trouble about it?" the Inspector asked.

"Not a bit," said the policeman, laughing. "He was in the street when it happened. Said he had to climb a pole. He's full of splinters. Said he'd sign an order to burn the circus as well."

The Inspector laughed. "Fine. All right, Joe."

The car moved away. "What's all this about a lion?" Joe asked. "Everybody is talking about it."

"That's the lion you are going to see," said the Inspector. He explained to Tim. "Joe is a doctor of animals, Tim. He cares for animals, like a doctor cares for people."

Tim was interested. "Oh," he said. "Will you make Samson well?"

"He will, Tim, don't worry," said the Inspector.

Joe was a bit bewildered, but kept silent under the appeal of the Inspector's wink.

The car stopped outside the circus entrance. The town had

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returned to normal. "You stay here, Tim," said the Inspector. "We won't be long."

They left him. Tim opened a window. He could smell the circus. He didn't want to go in there again.

Joe was looking at Samson.

"What do you think?" the Inspector asked.

"I'm afraid so," said Joe.

"You wait here," said the Inspector.

He found the owner. He presented him with the signed order.

"You can't do that," he protested. "It's illegal. There's nothing wrong with him. Just because some crazy kid let him out. That's no reason. Here, Alphonsus. You know that Samson is all right, isn't he? Isn't Samson all right?"

"Strong as a lion," said Alphonsus, chuckling.

"You are Putrid," said the Inspector suddenly to Alphonsus. He thought how vivid had been the boy's description of him. "You're a dirty little sadistic bastard," he said, "and if a lion doesn't tear you to pieces some day, some honest man will kick your puddens out."

Putrid's mouth was open in astonishment. The owner protested. "Here," he said. "You can't say things like that."

"You keep that fella away from your animals," said the Inspector, and walked away from them.

Joe was at the cage. He was putting away a syringe. Samson was lying on the floor of the cage, his legs stiffened straight out from him. His chest was not rising.

They looked at the body of the lion.

"He should have been destroyed years ago," Joe said.

"Poor devil," said the Inspector. He put his hand through the bars of the cage, rested it on the body of Samson.

"That's from Tim, Samson," he said, and then they walked back to the car. They could sense the silence of the boy.

"What happened?" Tim asked.

Joe started the car. The Inspector put his arm around Tim's shoulders. "Samson has gone back to the woods, Tim," he said. "You watch. One time maybe when you are playing in that wood, you might see Samson standing in the sunlight."

"Resting on the soft leaves," said Tim eagerly.

"That's right," said the Inspector.

★ ★ ★

NOTWITHSTANDING . . .

We like someone *because:* We love someone *although.*

HENRY DE MONTHERLANT

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McCreary's Luck

BY MICHAEL EAST

Mike McCreary, an oil-driller out of a job, was to be extradited from Singapore by police captain Raka when wealthy Rubensohn signed him on. Mike escorts the drunken Raka from Rubensohn's yacht: realizes Rubensohn has trapped him: it is a dead man he is supporting. Raka had been bumped off after negotiating Rubensohn's oil concession with the Sultan of Karang Sharo. Mike's job is to strike oil there so that Rubensohn can sell out quickly. Accusing Rubensohn of murder, Mike forces him to promise a share of the profits: realizes his own life will be in danger once the well is struck.

A more subtle danger threatens: McCreary meets the lovely Lisette, treated as a chattel by Rubensohn, and falls deeply—and dangerously—in love. The voyage is ending—for McCreary and Lisette, danger is just beginning.

"THERE it is, McCreary! Karang Sharo." Rubensohn's voice was higher than usual with the excitement of the landfall. "Here, take the glasses!"

They were standing on the bridge, with Captain Janzoon, watching the island grow from a blur on the horizon to a sharp contour. McCreary took the glasses and focused carefully. He saw a long serrated spine of mountains rising slowly to a high truncated cone over which a small mushroom of smoke hung lazily in the still air.

He whistled and turned to Rubensohn. "Volcanic, eh? You didn't tell me that."

"Is it important?"

"Could be. You might find natural gas instead of oil."

Rubensohn smiled his slow, oblique smile and nodded approvingly. "You know your job, McCreary. You continue to impress me. It's a question I had already taken up with the surveyors. They tell me the odds are on oil."

"They'd know, of course," said McCreary, with mild irony.

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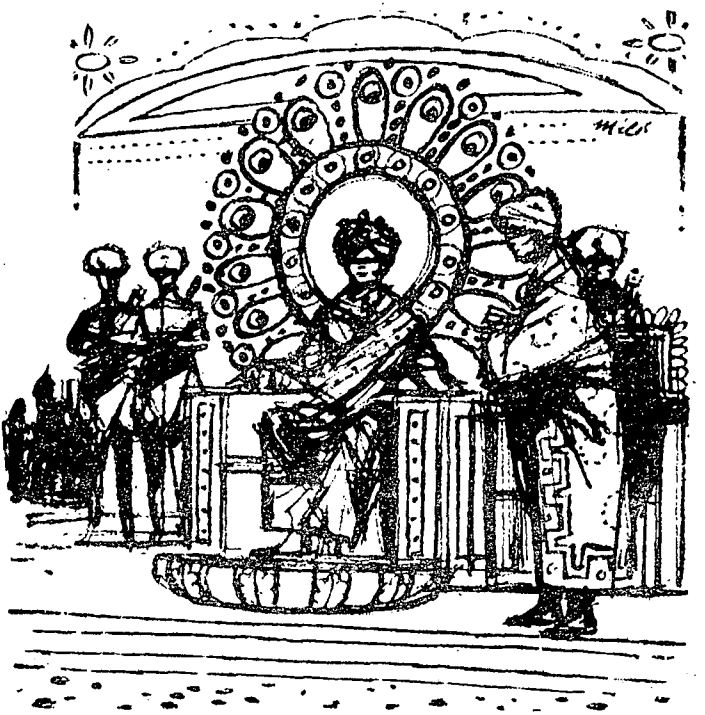

He handed the glasses back to Rubensohn and stood watching the helmsman bring the nose of the *Corsair* on to the new tack.

Janzoon said tentatively, " Maybe Lisette would like to see this."

" I'm going below to shave." McCreary's voice was as casual as he could make it. " I'll be back to see us enter harbour. Like me to knock on the door and tell Lisette where you are? "

" As you wish," said Rubensohn, over his shoulder. " And ask her to bring up my sun-glasses. I'll need them shortly."

" I'll do that." He waited a moment longer lest even a suspicion of haste betray him, but Rubensohn was still peering through the glasses at the dragon-spine mountains of Karang Sharo.

His heart was pounding when he reached the door of the state-room. This would be the first private moment he had had with her since she had come to his cabin. He knocked on the door.

" It's me—McCreary. Open up, quickly."

" McCreary, what—? " He moved swiftly inside, closed the door, and took her in his arms, stifling her questions with a kiss. Then he released her and talked swiftly and urgently.

" How—how I've missed you! " She came to him again, fiercely and passionately, drawing his face down to her own, and

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pressing her body against him. " I'm frightened, McCreary. Today is the beginning of it, and I'm frightened."

" So am I, my dark one," said McCreary soberly. " Frightened for you more than for myself. I've got to talk to you somehow."

" Perhaps when Miranha comes aboard, they may want to talk privately. If I can get away then . . . ? "

" I'll be in my cabin. I'll wait for you. Now get up on the bridge as quickly as you can—and don't forget the sun-glasses."

" Kiss me, please."

When the kiss was done, she reached up with her small ivory hands and touched his cheeks and said softly, " It is a small thing, I know, to be loved by a woman like me from the Peacock Pavilion; but I love you, McCreary. Whatever happens, I love you."

" I love you, dark one," said McCreary gravely. " And nothing is going to happen but good for both of us."

Abruptly as he had come, he left her, and she stood looking at the blank door wondering how she could bring herself to tell him of the fate that Rubensohn had decreed for her.

Two steps from the door of Rubensohn's state-room, McCreary cannoned into his ally, Guido, the wireless officer. He caught him by the arm and hustled him inside his own cabin. " I want to talk to you. I'm trying to establish two things, Guido. First, if a code message comes in for Rubensohn, can we read it? "

" Sure," said Guido confidently.

" Second, if I want to send a message in Rubensohn's name can I do it and get away with it? "

" Senz' altro! You can get away with it. I just see it as the traffic goes through. When he cables Singapore, he begins ' For Silva ' and signs himself ' Rex.' When he cables New York, he begins ' For Mortimer ' and signs himself ' Imperator.' "

" Have you seen any traffic from Rubensohn to Scott Morrison? "

" Only two messages."

" How were they addressed? "

" Morrison—M.V. *Melanie.*"

" And the signature? "

" Asmin. It is a cable address for South East Asian Mineral Research, Rubensohn's company."

" No other signature? "

" Oh yes, always Janzoon."

" From now on, I want a copy of all incoming messages. And hold any outgoing traffic until I've given you a clearance to send it."

Guido's eyes popped and the cigarette fell out of his mouth. " I try to help you, McCreary, but this is suicide you want! "

McCreary's lean face split into a lopsided grin. " We can do it, Guido, and spit in Rubensohn's eye at the same time."

Karang Sharo lay ahead and to port, but the harbour was hidden behind a long flank of hillside that tapered down from the peak of the volcano. The sky was clear and cloudless and the sun struck back cruelly from the smooth water and made vivid patterns of light

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and shadow in the folds of the land. McCreary stood with Rubensohn and Lisette and let the warmth and the colour seep into him. Lisette was cool and remote, her eyes an enigma behind the dark glasses. Rubensohn was elated and voluble. "McCreary," he said, "you're an amusing fellow. I should keep you near me always."

"You'd get tired of me," said McCreary blandly. "The Irish make good playmates, but uncomfortable bedfellows."

"Do they make good lovers?"

"I'm not a woman," said McCreary softly, "I wouldn't know."

"What do you think, Lisette?" Rubensohn's voice was barbed.

Lisette shrugged indifferently. "I know nothing about love."

"A neat point, McCreary!" Rubensohn's red lips smiled, but his eyes were bleak. "Lisette is a woman of some experience."

Slowly they rounded the green finger of land and the harbour of Karang Sharo came into view. It was a great semicircle of still water fringed with golden sand. Behind it the land rose slowly.

Most startling of all was the Sultan's Palace. It was built on a broad plateau at the foot of the volcano and the land before it fell away in a series of hanging gardens bounded by elaborately carved palisades. At the back the volcano cone reared up majestically and the buildings themselves were splayed against it, like the spread tail of a peacock, fretted gold and turquoise and dark amber.

"Join us, McCreary!" Rubensohn's high voice summoned him. "I told you I would show you wonders."

"I never doubted you," said McCreary dryly.

"And there are as many wonders inside," said Rubensohn, with relish. "There are rooms for a hundred concubines and their children." Rubensohn's eyes glittered.

More from resentment than from immediate interest, McCreary changed the subject. He said flatly, "Where will I be drilling?"

"Over there!" Rubensohn pointed northward, away from the Palace to where a secondary range of hills broke into the terraces and formed a small re-entrant with the main range.

Captain Janzoon bellowed an order. The bell rang again, "Finished with engines," and they were riding at anchor with that curious feeling—half surprise, half disappointment—that comes with the last landfall.

A few minutes later, a launch ground awkwardly against the plates of the *Corsair*, and Pedro Miranha, Rubensohn's agent on the island, came scrambling up the monkey-ladder.

"Good morning, gentlemen! Welcome to Karang Sharo. A big day for the island. Everybody is out, as you see. Even from the Palace they will be watching. Everything's ready for you . . ."

"Did you get the pontoons built?" Rubensohn asked curtly.

"All built—ready to haul out. Four of them . . ."

Rubensohn cut him short with a gesture. "Good. I want you and Janzoon to come down to my cabin. There's a lot to talk about." Without a word to Lisette or McCreary, Rubensohn turned on his heel and walked down the companion-ladder.

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Miranha and Janzoon followed him. McCreary linked his arm in Lisette's and led her towards his own cabin.

With the door closed and bolted behind them, they clung together for a long moment and McCreary was amazed at the pent-up passion in her small doll-like body. Slowly they relaxed and McCreary made her sit down on the bed beside him. He took her hands in his own and said gravely, "There's a lot to talk about, dark one. Let's get that over first."

"I know that, Mike." It was the first time she had used his Christian name. "But first I want you to listen to me."

"Sure, I'll listen. What do you want to tell me?"

"He guesses about us, Mike."

McCreary nodded. "I gathered that, on the bridge. Has he said anything to you?"

"Not in so many words. But you know how he is—secretive, jealous, probing, waiting for the moment when he can hurt most. He wants to destroy you, Mike."

"I know that," said McCreary simply. "But he can't do anything until I've brought in a well for him. And before that I hope to make a few arrangements of my own— "

"Please, Mike! Let me talk first."

There was so much urgency in her voice, so much pain in her eyes, that he had no choice but to let her go on.

"I want to tell you about myself, Mike. I want so much that you should understand. If you don't understand, you will do something foolish—something that will be no profit to either of us."

"Before you go on, Lisette," McCreary's voice was grim, "I'll tell you bluntly. What touches you, touches me. If I have to blast our way out of this rat-hole, I'm going to do it—and take you with me."

"I know, Mike, I know. But please—please listen! I told you Rubensohn found me in the Peacock Pavilion in Saigon. I never told you how I came there."

"I've never asked to know."

"But I want to tell you. I did not belong to Saigon. I was from the north—Haiphong. My husband was an official of the French administration."

"Your husband?" The word shocked him like water splashed in his face.

Lisette nodded simply. "His name was Raoul Morand. He was a metis like myself, half French, half Tonkinese, so that when the war started and Ho Chi Minh's army moved down from the north, we were not evacuated. We joined the refugees, moving south. We made it, too. We came to Binh Dinh and even found a modest lodging outside the town. Raoul went out each day to try to make contact with a French official with power to give him back his old job. Then, one evening, the soldiers came . . . three of them, from the Binh Xuyen. They were looking for spies, they said. And they stood Raoul against a wall and made him watch while they stripped me. They mocked him all the while and told him what

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they were going to do to me and when he tried to break away and help me, they shot him.

"When they had finished, they took me with them to Saigon and sold me to the Peacock Pavilion, because the Binh Xuyen collected the revenues from such houses and the troops stocked them and controlled them. I was alive, though I did not wish to be. But after a while I began to be grateful even for that small mercy. Then, one night, Rubensohn came and was pleased with me and offered to take me away. He bought me from the Pavilion for a big price and made me his mistress, and I have travelled with him ever since."

"Is that all, dark one?" McCreary's voice was sombre.

"No, it is not all!" Her eyes were bright with challenge. "There is a moral to my story, Mike. First I will tell you, truthfully, that even in the Peacock Pavilion one can be grateful for the gift of life. And then I will say that when Raoul died for me, he did a useless thing. Had he not tried to help me, had he been able to bear what they were doing to me, we might have been together now. I might never have come to the Peacock Pavilion and there would have been nothing but the memory of that one night, and, in time, we might have forgotten even that."

Her voice rose sharply and she reached out and grasped his hands again, desperately. "Death is the end of hope, the end of love for the one who is left, Mike. So that's what I want you to promise me . . . whatever happens, whatever Rubensohn tries to do to hurt me . . . you will stay alive. Will you promise, Mike?"

"I promise, sweetheart," said McCreary softly.

His arms went round her and drew her to him so that her head was pillowed on his breast, her small, perfect body pressed against his own.

The setting sun dropped swiftly behind the spine of the mountains and at a single stride darkness came down on the islands and on the sea. The stars pricked out, and the yellow lanterns in the kampongs; and the glow of the volcano was spread softly against the night sky. As if at a signal, the torches were lit. On the beach first, then all the way up the winding path and along the climbing terraces of the Palace. Their flames tossed and waved in the hands of the torch-bearers, so that it seemed as if a long fiery serpent were writhing down the mountainside.

When McCreary came on deck dressed for the evening, he found the other officers standing watching the display, stiff as pouter pigeons in mess-jackets and starched whites and scarlet cummerbunds. The gangway was down and the boat was bobbing below it, with the oars shipped and the bosun standing below, waiting to hand them aboard. Each officer had a crew member allotted to him and these stood apart, selfconscious in their clean clothes.

Guido sidled up and said softly, "I'm in the first boat, too, McCreary. I'd like to stay near you." They filed down the gangway, with their attendants following, into the waiting boat.

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When they came to the beach they found the litters drawn up between the lines of torch-bearers, and behind the lights they could see Rubensohn's gifts piled for the pack-carriers and covered with cloths. Under one of the covers, McCreary made out the shape of a small car lashed to long stout poles for its passage up the mountain. Farther away stood a line of Palace guards, holding back a press of people whose murmur was like the buzzing of a hive of bees. The torchlight flickered on their shining brown faces.

A litter-bearer touched McCreary lightly on the arm and pointed to his place. McCreary climbed awkwardly onto the platform and seated himself on a low chair covered with patterned silk, which smelt of spices and sandalwood.

Then, at a word of command, the bearers bent and lifted the long poles onto their shoulders, and McCreary found himself riding high above the torches like a captain in some barbaric triumph. All the way up the mountain there were the lights and the people. The lights were scented with incense.

Above him the trees hung slack in the heavy air; beyond the leaves were the sky and the soft, low stars. Sometimes he heard the clatter of night birds, but it was a small sound against the cries of the villagers who laughed and shouted and beat their hands as the guests of the Sultan passed by.

Then, abruptly, they were at the gates.

Two great pillars of teak reared up, sculptured with flowers and writhing monsters and capped with the spread wings of birds. There were guards at each pillar and they waved the procession forward. As they passed, McCreary saw the big wooden gates, carved as intricately as a pair of screens, and beyond them the climbing gardens, tier on tier, through which they must pass.

There were lights at every window and in every arch and colonnade so that the fretwork of stone seemed feather-light, liable to blow away in the first wind. But there was no wind. The air was heavy with flowers and burnt incense and a faint, tinkling music of gamlang bells. Lulled by the swaying of the litter, McCreary felt that he was floating, disembodied in an opium dream, incapable of decision or action.

Then, at last, the dream ended. The litters were lowered to the ground and, as they stepped out stiffly, they found themselves in a wide, open courtyard at the end of which a flight of steps led up to the glowing fretwork of the Palace. At the top of the steps stood the fat Vizier, waiting with a retinue to greet them.

Slowly they mounted the steps, their servants following a step behind them. The Vizier greeted them in soft Malay and led them along an elaborate colonnade carved in Hindu fashion, and into a huge chamber lined with pillars, at the end of which was a raised throne backed by a fretted stonework screen.

They looked at each other, dumb with amazement. The hall was large enough to deploy an army. The centre square was brightly lit and set round the edge with piled cushions and low tables of carved wood and pearl inlay. In the shadows behind

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the pillars, servants in embroidered blouses and colourful sarongs waited silently and, to the left of the throne, a gamlang orchestra played its tinkling monotonous rhythms.

The throne itself shone with changing lights as the jewels reflected the wavering flames of the lamps that hung from the ceiling and from the pendants on the pillars.

On the right of the main throne, a smaller one had been raised, less richly jewelled, obviously movable. McCreary wondered whether it had been set for Rubensohn.

The Vizier led them to the row of cushions immediately facing the throne, and seated them a little to one side of the centre trio. Guido squatted next to McCreary and watched wide-eyed as the Vizier clapped his hands to bring a small troupe of servants, each carrying a tray of beaten silver on which was palm-liquor in a silver goblet and a box of strange sticky sweetmeats.

They bowed, presented their offerings, and withdrew. As they sipped the sweet, flat liquor, McCreary said, "Where's Rubensohn, I wonder?"

Guido shrugged theatrically. "He'll be here! The big entrance, with Janzoon in all his gold braid, and your girl on his arm. I wouldn't be surprised if he marched straight up to the throne and took over from the Sultan." He grinned and turned away, chattering in Italian to the other officers. McCreary sipped his liquor and surrendered himself to contemplation of the barbaric splendour around him.

Now, he thought, he could understand the dreams of the filibusters. This was the thing that had beckoned them out, century after century—this vision of peacock thrones and gods with jewels for eyes, and treasure stores under the foundations of fairy palaces. For them, power was a tangible thing.

Rubensohn had that streak in him. It showed in his moments of exaltation and in the cool daring of his roguery. He was a big man—he might even have been a great one, but for the taint of cruelty and perverted cunning.

The music stopped suddenly, then began again on a new and stronger beat. There was a rustle of draperies and a murmur of voices and the courtiers filed in, gaudy as parrots in silk blouses and embroidered vests and sarongs.

A moment later, the Vizier entered again. Rubensohn, Janzoon, and Lisette followed him. The beauty of her was breathtaking. Her small body was clothed in a sari of gold, draped ceremonial-fashion over her hair and falling in soft folds to the golden sandals. There were emeralds at her throat and on her wrists, and her skin glowed like alabaster.

Her face was a sculptor's mask, immobile, perfect, in which her dark eyes were the only sign of life.

Rubensohn and Janzoon led her to the centre cushion and settled her comfortably. Then she drew the sari round her face like a veil and sat, silent and absorbed, waiting for the ceremony to begin.

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The fat Vizier moved to the foot of the throne and stood waiting. A gong sounded, brazen and terrible, echoing through the colonnades and up among the sculptured figures on the ceiling. The whole assembly stood up and waited with bowed heads and closed eyes, while the Vizier chanted the ten ceremonial names of the Sultan of Karang Sharo, ending with the greatest name of all—Navel of the Universe.

When they looked up, he was standing on the dais, against the spread of the peacock throne, with his guards ranged about him and the chair at his side still vacant. He sat down. The company waited till he had raised his hand and they, too, settled themselves on the cushions.

Then the fat Vizier took the floor again.

He spoke, he said, unworthily in the name of the great, whose voice was a thunder that might wake the sleeping mountain. His voice—which he prayed might be like flowers in his mouth—was raised to welcome the strangers whose coming would bring prosperity to the land and wealth to the people. They came as friends, bearing gifts, which were the promise of greater gifts. But, the great one, he of the ten names and the greatest name of all, was not to be outdone in generosity. So now, to each of the strangers, he would give his own gift, a jewel to wear on his heart, a flower to perfume his pillow.

He raised a pudgy hand and the gongs sounded again. From the shadowy colonnade came seven girls, small and perfect, bright as blossoms, each bearing a small cushion on which lay a jewel set in the soft filigree of the local craftsmen. They came and knelt in front of Rubensohn and McCreary and each of the officers, and tendered the gifts. Then they knelt beside the cushions in an attitude of submission to their new masters.

The gongs sounded again and Rubensohn stood up. McCreary watched him, fascinated. Hate him as you might, there was no denying the power that went out from him. His clothes were drab beside the bright finery of the Asiatics, yet he dominated the assembly, and seemed to dwarf even the figure on the peacock throne.

He paused a moment and then began to speak in perfect Malay, full of allusion and hieratic hyperbole. He was grateful, he said, for the princely honours done to him and to his friends. The gifts he had brought were small and unworthy beside those of the prince—but they were a promise of greater ones. Moreover, they came from a new world, where wonders sprang up like mango trees from the hands of a magician . . .

As he spoke, the servants began carrying the gifts from the rear of the hall and ranging them a little to the side of the throne.

There was a box that would bring the voices of the world into the Palace of Karang Sharo. There was a machine that would light the whole Palace at the touch of a finger. There was a palanquin on wheels that would carry the Navel of the Universe wherever he wished—so soon as roads were built to accommodate

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it. There were guns for the Royal armoury and glassware such as the princes of Europe used. There were silks for the Royal household and jewels for the fingers of the Royal wives. There were gifts for every officer of the Palace . . .

He paused, while the last of the boxes were stacked around the shining runabout, incongruous and laughable amid the ancient magnificence.

And finally, the greatest gift in his power to bestow, a pearl of incomparable quality, a personal gift for the Navel of the Universe, which he begged humbly to present in person . . .

Slowly he raised Lisette to her feet, and walked her step by step down the empty space to the foot of the throne.

"Dear God, no!" McCreary's voice was a whisper of horror and he started to his feet, but Janzoon and Guido clamped their hands on him and held him down, and Guido's voice spoke desperately in his ear. "Not now, for pity's sake! They will cut you down and you cannot help her! Control yourself—for her sake!"

He sank back on the cushions, feeling their fingers bite into his arms, and he watched Lisette prostrate herself like a slave at the feet of the Sultan. Then he saw the brown hands lift her to her feet, unveil her, and lead her to the throne beside his own, while the courtiers sighed in soft wonderment at her beauty.

He saw Rubensohn bow and walk slowly back to his place, a thin smile on his lips, his eyes bright with triumphant malice. He longed desperately to leap at him and tear him down and trample him; but Guido and Janzoon still held him and he could not even find voice to curse his tormentor.

Then the document of concession was presented and the music began again and with it the long procession of waiters bearing food and drink. The jugglers came, and the acrobats, and the dancers, moving like jointed dolls in the rhythms of the old mimes.

But McCreary saw none of it. He sat silent and stone-faced, filling himself with liquor and watching Lisette, perched beside the peacock throne, being fed like a bird from the brown fingers of the Sultan.

When the evening was over, they hoisted McCreary, dead drunk, onto the litter; and when they came to the ship, Guido and the little brown slave undressed him and put him to bed.

He woke, deathly sick. His head was hammering and his tongue was too big for his mouth. His skin was clammy and smelt of stale liquor and the sheets were wrapped round him like a shroud. He saw the cabin was full of sunlight and a brown girl was sitting in his chair, watching him with wide solemn eyes.

Then he remembered—and the memory was like a blow in the belly . . . The brown girl helped him to dress, and he sent her to the galley for coffee and a sick man's breakfast. She answered quickly enough to his own Malay, but he was too fuddled to piece out much of her exotic island dialect. Soon he would have to go on

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deck to superintend the loading of the motors and generators—and then, he thought, his real test would come.

For all the sickness in his belly and the ache in his heart, he would have to face them with a grin, make them uncertain of their victory, uneasy about his future actions. He had one trump left—without him they couldn't get oil. Everything depended on how and when he played it.

The girl came back with his coffee and a plate of rice for herself. She squatted native-fashion at his feet, and while she ate, McCreary questioned her gently. " What's your name, little one? "

" I am called Flame Flower, Tuan."

" It's a pretty name."

" I am glad it pleases the Tuan."

" You understand that you belong to me now? "

" I understand, Tuan."

" Shortly I must go to work. While I am gone, you will wash my clothes and when they are dry you will pack them with the others as I will show you. We are going away from here."

She looked up at him with shining, guileless eyes. " And I shall be the Tuan's woman and care for him and . . . "

" You'll care for me, little one," said McCreary hastily, and added to himself, " And we'd better leave the rest for a later time. I've got problems enough as it is." He drank the last of his coffee, got up, tossed his laundry into a heap, and showed her his grip and how to pack it. Then he put on a pair of dark glasses to hide the worst ravages of the night and went up on deck.

McCreary looked across the dazzling water to the Palace below the mountain and thought of Lisette. A moment later, Rubensohn spoke at his elbow, " You're stirring early, McCreary."

" Habit of years," said McCreary coolly. " The morning's the best part of the day."

" You enjoyed your evening? "

" Sure . . . It was a good night." McCreary forced a grin, thankful that his eyes were hidden behind the dark glasses.

" Lisette looked beautiful, I thought."

" So did I."

" You don't disapprove of my bargain? "

" I think you're a bastard," said McCreary, without rancour. " But then I've known that all along." It was a calculated crudity, but he saw no shame in it. He felt a grim satisfaction when he saw Rubensohn's recoil and watched him battle to control himself.

" You're tougher than I thought, McCreary." It was a high whisper, soft as silk.

" I have to be," said McCreary. " I'm playing in a tough school. And while we're talking business, there's the small matter of an agreement to be signed and delivered before I start work."

" I'll have it ready for you in an hour," said Rubensohn flatly.

" And before we sign it . . . "

" Yes? "

" I'd like to see your passport."

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It took Rubensohn completely off guard. His head flicked back, his eyes narrowed, and his reedy voice was unsteady. "What are you driving at, McCreary?"

McCreary leaned back against the rail and smiled at him.

"I want to see a legal document, with a verifiable signature."

Rubensohn looked at him, then, surprisingly, he smiled.

"I'll let you see it before we sign. Anything else?"

"Yes. Captain Janzoon, your—er—partner, has approached me with a proposition."

"What sort of a proposition?"

This, too, was news to Rubensohn and in spite of his control he could not conceal the first shock of surprise.

"It's a double," said McCreary sardonically. "At the moment he can't make up his mind which leg he wants. Either to buy me out for cash and guarantee protection from you, or team up with me to oust you . . . We could probably do it, too."

Rubensohn gave him a long, speculative look. "Then why do you tell me?"

"You're a big man, Rubensohn. I think you can do a lot for us," said McCreary deliberately. "But even big men can make mistakes that, in the end, destroy them. Your biggest mistake was to pick the wrong fellow to kick in the face. Janzoon will take it—and has—because he's scared. I'm not scared. I've got nothing to lose and a lot to gain. I've told you that before."

"You've changed a lot since that first night in Jakarta!"

"I learn fast," said McCreary, with genial good humour. "The Irish are good horse-copers."

Rubensohn nodded slowly and leaned against the rail, absorbed in a new, private thought. After a moment he turned to McCreary. "I'd feel happier if we could trust each other more."

"So would I," said McCreary. "But I don't doubt we'll come to it in time." He changed the subject abruptly. "The loading'll be finished in a couple of hours. As soon as we've got the agreement fixed, I'd like to be off. You'll be down often, of course, to watch progress?"

"Every day," said Rubensohn. "Until the well blows in."

"And then you're thinking of killing me?"

"I had thought of it," said Rubensohn, with surprising frankness. "Now I've changed my mind. I'll get you to kill Janzoon instead."

"You're lying again," said McCreary amiably.

Rubensohn flushed angrily. "Now look, McCreary . . ."

"I've thought about it," said McCreary carefully, "just as I've worked out every damn trick in the book to stop you getting a drop of oil, if there's half a chance I'm going to be killed when it comes in." And with that, he turned away and walked over to the winches to watch the first generator being hoisted overside.

Two hours later, accompanied by Guido, McCreary left the ship for the drilling-site. He had the survey charts in his pocket and

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with them, Rubensohn's contract giving him, in return for services rendered, a quarter share of the proceeds of the sale and the right to claim payment direct from Scott Morrison, the purchaser.

He had no illusions about the validity of the document. There is no law in the world that can enforce a payment to a criminal accessory. He was more interested in the fact that Rubensohn's name really was Rubensohn and that he had a specimen of his legal signature verified from the passport.

The passport had given him other information, too. Rubensohn was a British subject, Polish by birth, he had been naturalized ten years before. His age was forty-eight and his names were Joseph Ladislas. The passport itself was a double-sized book to cope with Rubensohn's peripatetic existence.

The day might come when he could make use of these facts. For the present there were other matters to occupy him.

After a little time, Guido broached the subject that was troubling him. "What are you going to do now, amico?"

"Work," said McCreary tersely. "Work and plan to get Lisette out and bring Rubensohn down."

Guido whistled. "Get her out? You think you can?"

"I'm going to try."

"But how? You saw what the Palace is like. The women are kept in their own quarters. There are guards . . ."

"I know," McCreary nodded gravely. "But we can make a beginning. These girls—" He pointed to Flame Flower and Agnello's girl—"they come from the Palace, remember. They know the layout. They can help."

"If they will, yes. These are women, too, McCreary. It would be wise to remember that. If you want help, you will have to pay for it—one way or another. If you want your Lisette back, you must have an ally, not a rival."

"Hell!" said McCreary succinctly.

"That's what I mean," chuckled Guido. "Another thing . . . You get your Lisette out, it is still not enough. You have to get her away from the island—otherwise you both end in the hands of the torturers. You think Rubensohn will give you a free passage on the *Corsair*?"

"I doubt it."

"So you think of that, too. You remember that we are three people—you, me, the girl—anchored on an island, and the man who owns the transport is a man who wants to kill you."

"I've thought of it," said McCreary. "I've thought it over and over and it all adds up to the one answer. Some day, soon, I'm going to kill Rubensohn. But before I do, I'm going to strip him of everything he's got. Don't ask me how, but I'm going to do it."

"I wish you luck," said Guido.

"Tell me," McCreary dropped his voice and jerked his head at the pair ahead of him, "this Agnello, the engineer, what sort of man is he? He's going to work with me most of the time. I'd like to think I could trust him."

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Guido shrugged and kicked out at a pecking chicken.

"You know engineers. They eat cotton-waste and bath in machine-oil. Sometimes I think they want nothing better than to marry an engine and breed little ones. Agnello is like that. He has a sad face like a horse and he never says more than two words. What he thinks or feels, you will have to find out for yourself. If you can make him a friend, we are much stronger. Without him, they cannot run the ship."

"I'll spend some time on him," said McCreary thoughtfully.

Now they had left the last of the villages and were rounding the low spur that divided the drilling area from the rest of the island. The clearing swarmed with brown, chattering men, and the equipment was piled along one side of it in neat stacks.

McCreary looked about him with a practised eye. It was a good spot, easy to work in. There was clean, mountain water, free from the pollution of the kampongs. There was good timber handy, and bamboo and palm boles in abundance for the lighter construction of the huts. When the day was ended, they could sit and look out over the sea, away from the plague of mosquitoes, and if they climbed the spine of the mountains, they could look down on the approaches to the Palace. Perhaps, even, he might catch a glimpse of Lisette as she walked in the walled gardens among the women. He reminded himself to ask Guido to get a pair of field-glasses from the ship.

Miranha came up to him, waving his arms, hopping from foot to foot, and talking in his huckster's whine. "Here we are, senhor. You are the number one here, they tell me. There is your gear, there are my workmen. You tell Miranha what you want and we get busy, eh?"

"Right!" said McCreary crisply, and, calling to Agnello and Guido, he began pacing out the locations.

By mid afternoon they had sorted themselves out and McCreary was able to stand with Guido on the upper edge of the clearing and watch the job take shape. Agnello and his boys were working on the foundations for the big splay-legs of the derrick; the logs for the engine-beds were being cut and hauled in from the jungle; the frames for the living-huts and the shelters were already in position and the brown figures were swarming over the roofs, laying the thatch of alang grass.

McCreary found a deep satisfaction in this antlike activity. It was sacrilege to think of it as a criminal enterprise, with death and disaster at the end of it.

Guido pointed down the hillside to where the flapping scarecrow figure of Miranha was hustling a line of boys cutting alang grass. "There's the man who can help you—Miranha. He knows this place. He knows the backdoors to the Palace. He's got a boat, too . . . that ketch moored in the main harbour. He's a trader, isn't he? He knows these waters. He could get you to Timor."

"I don't trust him," said McCreary flatly. "He's a dock-rat. He'd sell his own mother for a fistful of coppers."

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"You don't have to trust him," Guido persisted, "you only have to frighten him. When this thing blows up—as it must do one day, like a bomb—who is here? Not us, not Rubensohn—Miranha! If the Sultan wants to roast somebody's toes—who's the nearest? Who's the interpreter and the agent? Miranha! I think if you talk to him and tell him the facts, and offer him a nice fat reward, you will have yourself an ally—and a boat as well."

McCreary looked down at the little Neapolitan and laughed. "We'd better change jobs, Guido. Seems you're the only one with brains around here."

"Not me!" said Guido firmly. "Not for a million pounds would I sleep in your bed! Every night I would have nightmares, thinking my throat was cut."

"I've got 'em now," said McCreary sombrely. "But somehow I've got to learn to live with 'em."

By sunset, the living-huts and the main storehouses had been built. Guido had gone back with Miranha after setting up the radio pack and giving McCreary instructions for its operation.

Guido had wanted to stay the night, but McCreary had refused. It would be unwise, so soon, to let Rubensohn see too close an association between himself and the little radio man. Their communication system was sketchy enough—and at all costs it had to be kept open.

McCreary and Agnello were sitting together outside McCreary's hut, drinking beer. They were halfway through their second bottle, when McCreary said, "Tell me, Agnello, how did you come to join this outfit? Why do you stay with it?"

Agnello puffed placidly at his pipe and considered the question. "Simple enough. Here I am number one. On a big ship, I would be number two. Nobody bothers me and I get good pay. That's important. In Florence I have a wife and two daughters who must soon be provided with dowries. So . . . it suits me."

"Lucky fellow."

Agnello smoked his pipe and sipped his beer and looked out into the moonrise. He fidgeted and jerked his thumb in the direction of the girls at the fire. He said awkwardly, "What—what am I expected to do with that?"

McCreary chuckled. "It depends on you, Agnello."

Agnello frowned and mumbled unhappily.

"I know, but—but I am not interested. When I was younger, I was happy to make a fool of myself. Now . . . when I see my friends going down to the houses near the docks—when I see things happen like last night in the Palace—I think of my daughters, and I have no taste left for it. I just ask . . . I don't want to criticize what you do; but for me . . ."

McCreary dropped his cigarette on the ground and trod it out with his heel. He grinned wryly in the darkness and said, "It's fine with me, Agnello. So long as you're here, we'll share my hut. You'll keep me out of mischief, too. The girls can bunk in

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together." For the first time a slow smile dawned on the engineer's long face.

"A thousand thanks, my friend. Now I can enjoy my supper."

They both laughed and McCreary thought that he, too, might eat better and sleep sounder—and build a little hope on a new ally.

Early next morning, when Agnello was out with Miranha, Guido sent him word on the buzzer. "Rubensohn's on his way up to see you. He's given me a radio for Morrison."

"What is it?" signalled McCreary awkwardly. It was a long time since he had worked a key and his fingers were slow.

"Text begins: Operations begun stop Expect early result stop Stand by further reports stop Message ends. I sent it."

"Thanks. Remember field-glasses."

"Will bring this afternoon. Practise sending. Hard to read."

McCreary spelt out, "Go to hell," then switched off the power, laid aside the headphones, and lit a cigarette. He was smiling to himself. His talk with Rubensohn was beginning to have effect.

He stepped out of the hut and walked down the slope to the work gangs, whistling jauntily to himself.

Miranha was directing a bunch of boys stacking the big fuel-drums under a thatched shelter. When McCreary came up to him, he showed his teeth in a betel-stained smile and immediately launched into a rasping monologue. "We're doing well, senhor, aren't we? See! It begins to look like something. But you've got to understand these fellows. Smile at 'em, but keep driving all the time. You're satisfied, I hope. If there's anything you want, tell Miranha. I get it fixed, pronto. I promised Mr. Rubensohn co-operation, fullest service. When I say that, I mean it. Value for money, eh? That makes good business for both of us."

"Sure," said McCreary coolly. "You're doing fine. Just keep the work rolling. I'll let you know if there's anything I want."

Miranha licked his lips. His bloodshot eyes looked both ways at once. He said in a confidential whisper, "You—er—you couldn't sell me a bottle of whisky, senhor?"

"I'll give you a bottle," said McCreary curtly. Miranha began to pour out a profuse speech of gratitude, but McCreary cut him short. "Tell me, what are you getting paid for this?"

"Three pounds sterling a day, in Indonesian rupiahs. It's only a pittance, of course."

McCreary grinned at him ironically. "Tell me . . . where do you trade normally?"

"Oh, Ambon, Buru, east to Kai Ketjil and south to Timor. I could put some business your way, perhaps?"

"What did you have in mind?"

"This stuff." Miranha jerked his thumb at the stacks of fuel drums. "It costs like gold in Dili, which is the only place I can buy it. Then I can't build up a store because it cuts down my cargo space. So half my trip I run the ketch on sail. That doubles my time and halves my profit. You got more than you need there . . . I can make you a nice offer. Stone . . . some jade, nice

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pieces, and other things. If you are interested, I'll show you."

"Bring 'em up to the hut one evening. We'll talk about it."

"Yes, senhor." Miranha flapped away, cursing the Malays, and McCreary looked after him with sardonic satisfaction.

Then he saw Rubensohn coming into the clearing, riding like a rajah on a litter carried by six men. McCreary tossed away his cigarette and walked over to him. Rubensohn greeted him cheerfully. "This is what I like to see, McCreary! Good organization, fast work. When do you think you can spud in?"

"Early to say. But we'll be ready in a week at the outside."

"One thing, McCreary—I'm sorry about it—but I'll have to take Agnello away from you. There's a message from the Palace. We made the Sultan a present of a lighting plant. He wants it put into running order, lots of wiring to be run . . ."

"You can't have Agnello!" said McCreary irritably. "Why waste a good engineer on a simple job like that? Any electrician's apprentice could do it. Why not leave me Agnello and send Guido instead? He's a radio man—he could run the wiring and connect it to the generator. He can drive a car, surely. Damn it all, Rubensohn, I don't give a curse whether the Sultan goes to bed by candlelight for the rest of his life. But we both care if this rig isn't working on schedule. I want Agnello here!"

Rubensohn was glad of the suggestion. "Of course! Wonder I didn't think of it myself. Guido's the obvious man."

Just before noon Rubensohn began to show signs of tiring. He signalled to the litter-bearers, shouted farewell to McCreary, and left—a crumpled white figure swaying down the hillside and into the jungle overhang.

McCreary climbed down from the framework and called to Agnello to join him. "Let's have a beer."

They sipped slowly, tasting it with relish. McCreary said blandly, "I've got things to tell you, Agnello . . . a long story."

McCreary told him about Lisette, about the Sultan's summons, and how he had persuaded Rubensohn to send Guido. Then he went on, "Guido may be able to make contact with Lisette. At least he'll be able to get some idea of the layout of the Palace and of the women's quarters in particular. When he comes this afternoon, I'm going to take him up the mountain there and see what sort of a view we get from this side. I may want to spend more and more time up there over the next few days. Can you run the camp and keep the work going?"

"No trouble at all," said Agnello. "But you must think further than that."

"I know," said McCreary. "But I can't think too far yet. I've got to play the cards as they fall. The big problem is to lift ourselves off the island once I get Lisette out."

Agnello put down his beer and began filling his pipe with maddening deliberation. Then he said calmly, "Miranha's got a boat."

"I can't trust all this to Miranha."

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"You don't have to do that. You tell me he wants you to sell him fuel. Good. You point out to him that you can't do it openly or all at once. You suggest he moves his ketch out of the main harbour and down to the bay there . . . so you can let him have a drum now and others later. He can take the stuff down at night. He will stay there so long as there's a chance of getting more out of you. So you have your boat—fuelled and ready to move, whenever you want."

McCreary whistled softly. "Holy Patrick! It might work at that! And if I were to get one of these native dug-outs and interest myself in some night fishing, so they'd be used to seeing me around . . . Let's have another drink to celebrate a noble thought."

"Not for me," said Agnello, with his slow smile. "I'll walk down and see how the work goes."

McCreary turned back into the hut, took out a pencil and paper, and began to sketch a plan of campaign.

The little brown girl came in and squatted down at his feet, watching him with wide expectant eyes. McCreary stroked her head absently and she leaned against him, purring like a contented kitten. It took him twenty minutes to realize that here was yet another ally—perhaps the strongest of all.

He leaned down and lifted her, feather-light, and sat her on the table in front of him. She sat there, smiling like a small brown doll, perfect as a doll, with her small pointed breasts and her honey skin and her tiny expressive hands.

He asked her gently, "What did you do in the Palace?"

"I served the Sultan's women. Sometimes, when one of the others was sick, I danced in the djoged dances."

"Were you shut in, like the Sultan's women?"

She laughed, amused at his ignorance. "No! Only the wives and the concubines were kept like that. We others were free to come and go. We were neither married nor betrothed."

"And no man comes near the women, only the Sultan?"

"No man. There are guards on the doors and it is death to any man to enter."

"Do they never have lovers then?"

Her eyes widened with surprise and a hint of fear. "Oh no! Who would risk the torturers and the fiery death?"

"What do you mean?"

She told him, making a pantomime with her small, fluent hands. "If a woman were unfaithful to the Sultan, she and her lover would be tortured first, under each other's eyes. Then they would be thrown together into Gurung Merapi—the mountain of fire."

A grim prospect, thought McCreary. Enough to cool the most ardent of lovers. He thought of Lisette penned among the twittering idle concubines, beating her heart out in the walled garden, and he was filled with anger against Rubensohn for what he had done to her. Flame Flower watched him with puzzled, questioning eyes.

Then he hit on an idea. He said carefully, "The woman who was given to the Sultan was my sister."

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To his surprise, Flame Flower laughed happily and clapped her hands. "Then you are both fortunate. To be the Sultan's woman is a great honour."

"No!" said McCreary gravely. "I am lonely for her. We were like flowers on the same stem, beans in the same pod. She did not want to go. She wanted to marry one of her own kind. I want to get a message to my sister and have her send a message to me. If I knew she was happy, I could be happy, too. Do you know how I could send it?"

"I could take it for you."

"You could?"

"Of course. That is how news comes and goes in the Palace. The guards know us and let us pass freely."

"Well, I'll be damned!" said McCreary, in English. "As simple as that."

"And when you know she is happy," said Flame Flower guilelessly, "you will begin to be happy with me?"

Then he knew it wasn't simple at all. It was damnably complicated. If he didn't watch his step with this girl, he'd be getting poison in his rice bowl.

McCreary focused the field-glasses, and scanned the dappled garden behind the high wall, and the elaborate colonnade at the end of it. The fountain was playing gently, but, unless they were hidden by the trees, there were no women in the Palace garden. They would show up quickly enough in their bright clothes. Perhaps if he waited for a while, they would come. The afternoon was still young. He shifted his position and began to scan the green sloping hillside that lay between their observation post and the boundaries of the Palace.

When the time came to bring Lisette out, this would be the way they would have to come—along the hillside and over the secondary hills and down the re-entrant to the drilling-site. The normal approach would be closed to them by the guards and the milling villagers. Carefully, he swept the hillside, up and down, along the jungle fringe, higher up in the sparse savannah. There was no path. It was as if by custom or interdict, this approach to the Palace was barred to the population of Karang Sharo.

McCreary put down the glasses and rubbed his eyes.

"Nothing yet. We'll wait a while longer."

"Relax a moment, amico, and tell me what you want me to do tomorrow."

McCreary propped his back against a shaded rock and gave Guido his instructions: they were crisp and detailed.

Then he added, "Now listen, Guido, this is the most important part of all. I don't know what hope you've got of making contact with Lisette, precious little, probably. You can't risk passing a note. You can't risk a direct approach even if you do catch sight of her. But somehow you've got to try to tell her that we're planning to get her out, that this side of the Palace is where she

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must watch, and that when she gets a message from me—no matter how—she's to act on it without question."

"I'll sing it to her," said Guido, with heavy irony.

"That's just what you will do," said McCreary sharply. "And for God's sake sing it in English, not Neapolitan."

"You offend me, amico! Neapolitan is the language of lovers. Even my girl is beginning to learn it. Oh, and another thing—Janzoon gave me a message for you. He's coming ashore in the morning. He'll be paying you a little visit."

"Now, I wonder," chuckled McCreary, "I wonder why he'd want to do that."

He slewed himself round again and focused the glasses on the Palace garden. At its lowest point, the wall looked anything from ten to twelve feet high—at its highest there was a drop of fifty feet to the jungle trees. A man would need rope and a grappling-hook to scale it. It would be simpler to get out than to get in. There was a big tree near the lower corner and its branches were thick and hung low to the level of the garden. Suddenly, his eye was caught by a flash of colour in the shadows of the colonnade. He lost it for a moment, then it appeared again and two figures in bright sarongs and blouses appeared and walked hand in hand towards the fountain. McCreary handed the glasses to Guido and said sharply, "Look at 'em, Guido, and tell me—men or women! They all look the same at this distance."

"Not to me, amico!" said Guido, with a connoisseur's conviction. "Let me see . . . No, they're women. There are two more coming out . . . but neither of them is Lisette."

"We're right!" said McCreary excitedly. "That's the women's quarters and the women's garden. Now we know where to look for her!" But though they waited and waited, taking turns with the glasses, they could not find Lisette among the bright, birdlike women walking in the dappled shade. After a long time they gave it up and walked slowly down through the jungle to the drilling-site.

That night, after they had eaten, Miranha came to see McCreary. Agnello winked solemnly and walked out to smoke his pipe. The two girls crept into the hut and sat on the bed, curious as children, while Miranha spread his offerings on the table under the lamp.

McCreary turned them over in his hands, stirred by their odd, exotic beauty, yet careful to conceal his interest from Miranha. He said indifferently, "What are they worth?"

Miranha waved a dirty hand and gave him a gap-toothed smile. "Say . . . three hundred gallons? Thirty drums?"

"Three hundred!" McCreary laughed in his face and pushed the stuff back across the table. "What do you take me for?"

"Say twenty drums?"

"Say fifteen and we might do business. I say 'might.'" McCreary held up a warning finger. "Because there's a risk in this. If Rubensohn finds out, I'm in the fire and so are you. I lose my job. You lose your profit and your fuel. Those are ten-gallon drums. How do you expect to get 'em away without being

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seen? You can't roll them to the beach under Rubensohn's nose."

"I could come at night and siphon it out."

"To hell with that! Once we start drilling, God knows who's likely to be here at night. No . . . if you want the stuff, we'll do it this way. Run your ketch out of the main harbour and anchor her in the cove down there. Then you can come up at night and take a couple of drums at a time. Not all in one week, either. We're going to be running our motors day and night during the drilling-time and I want this to look like normal usage."

Miranha looked unhappy and tried to haggle. "Fifteen drums—a hundred and thirty gallons . . . it's too little for what I pay."

McCreary waved him away. "You're doing damn well and you know it," said McCreary with a grin. "Half the stuff is junk and the other half will cost me boot leather and commission trying to . . ." There was a noise like an express train and the ground rocked crazily under their feet. The girls screamed and the lamp swung high against the ceiling thatch and back again. Then the noise passed and the ground steadied again and they looked at each other with wide startled eyes.

"Earth tremor," said Miranha uneasily. "We get them sometimes. We are in the belt. But that was a big fellow. Sometimes . . ." He licked his lips and gestured towards the rear wall of the hut. "Sometimes I wonder if Gurung Merapi isn't going to wake up and blow the lot of us to hell."

"Happy thought!" said McCreary laconically. He walked to the doorway and called out into the darkness. "Hey, Agnello! Are you all right?"

Agnello's voice floated up from the derrick-site.

"I'm all right! The framework looks all right, too. I'll check it in the morning. No other damage."

A good engineer, thought McCreary wryly. He thinks of his engines the way he thinks of his children.

He turned back to the hut to gather up Miranha's trinkets.

"Tomorrow," said Miranha anxiously. "Tomorrow night I run the boat round the point, then I can start to collect, eh?"

"That's right. But spread it out—remember, the longer you take, the better I'll like it."

"And if you strike oil, maybe you make me a better deal, eh?"

"If I strike oil," said McCreary genially, "I'll give you the lot. Every damned drum of it!"

The next day was unbearably long.

McCreary worked with a merciless intensity, trying to keep his mind off Lisette and wondering at every moment what Guido was doing in the Palace. At midday he drank a bottle of beer and ate a slice of papaw and was back again in twenty minutes, scrambling up the ribs of the derrick to check the work.

At three in the afternoon, Captain Janzoon came to see him.

McCreary led him over to the fringe of a clearing, sat down on a log, and offered cigarettes. Janzoon was red in the face and

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dripping with perspiration. His spade beard jerked nervously and his thick voice stumbled over the preamble . . .

"The proposition, McCreary. I thought about it, as I promised. I think . . . I know . . . we can do business."

"You do, now," said McCreary. "What's your offer?"

"We join forces," said Janzoon eagerly. "We work together, get rid of Rubensohn, and split fifty-fifty. That was your own idea, remember?" McCreary threw back his head and laughed.

Janzoon looked at him, angry and puzzled, while the startled birds squawked in the big casuarina tree behind them.

"If there is a joke, why not tell me?"

"The joke's on you, Janzoon."

"Why?"

"Rubensohn's asked me to team up with him and get rid of you."

Janzoon's jaw dropped slackly and his eyes were frightened. For a big man, with a captain's braid on his arm, there was very little fight in him. He said unsteadily, "You—you mean that?"

"I mean it," said McCreary coolly. "He asked me to kill you. He thought he and I could take over your share."

"But . . . but you don't believe that? You know what he's trying to do? Play us both off. Make us destroy each other!"

"I know that too." McCreary's voice was bitter. "So I'm better able to look after myself. I'm going my own way—and be damned to the pair of you."

McCreary's eyes were hard and his crooked mouth was tight. "Two days ago you could have had yourself a deal. Now, no. You knew what was going to happen to Lisette, but you never told me. You didn't lift hand or voice to stop it. Now the joke is that you'll never know who's going to pull the trigger, me or Rubensohn. Get to hell out of my camp. We're busy."

It was past sunset when Guido came to recount his adventures in the Palace. "I try to explain," he said, "that I must find a place for the motor and generator. I go inside to wire the hall. And while I work, I sing—loud and clear—so that at first they think I'm mad and afterwards they start to laugh. I make up a song to go with the music of *Marechiare*, and I tell of a girl who goes every night after dark into a garden to watch the mountain where her lover will come and signal with a lamp. Once, short and sharp . . . no more. Then I say that one day she has a message . . . and the same night the signal is three flashes . . . which means that her lover will come inside an hour and she must be ready to climb the tree and go over the wall to meet him.

"I sing it over and over, loud and clear, so that even on the ship they must have heard it."

"Let's hope they didn't," said McCreary eagerly. "What then? Did you get a reply?"

"I don't know what you'd call it," said Guido with a slow grin. "But after I finish, I hear giggling and talking behind the screen, and, after a while, a child comes out with a red flower in her hands

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and she says, loud and clear, but not knowing what it means, 'For the man.' I start up the engines, switch on the lights, show them how they work and know they don't understand. Then they give me a litter to take me back to the ship and I send the litter away and walk. And that's the news! Do you like it?"

"I like it fine!" said McCreary softly. "I like it more than anything I've heard for a long time. Pour the man another drink, Agnello . . . pour him all the drink he wants. And when he's had dinner, I'm going to give him . . ."

"Oh, and another thing—" Guido's eyes were bright with malice—"just to prove it really happened . . ."

He fished in the pocket of his shirt and brought out a small scarlet hibiscus, crushed and dying already, but still bright, and laid it in McCreary's palm. "I think she would mean it for you. My voice isn't all that good—especially not in English."

"Thanks, compar'," said McCreary shakily. "Mille, mille grazie!" Then Guido and Agnello bent, tense and attentive, across the bamboo table and he told them exactly what would happen the day the well came in.

Three days later they began to drill.

Rubensohn wanted to make a ceremony of the spudding-in—muster the officers and crew, bring down the Sultan and his court, break out champagne, and then start the motors and watch the bits gouge in for the first time. There was a streak of the dramatist in him with his perverted humour. McCreary rejected the idea out of hand. He was less than polite about it.

Rubensohn looked at him sharply and then shrugged. "Just as you please, of course. You're the boss . . . but why so prickly about it? Are you worried about something?"

"You're damn right, I'm worried." McCreary was determined not to spare him a moment of anxiety. "Any one of these tremors could topple the rig and we'd have to start again from scratch. If they get any worse they could cave in the well and we'd lose our bits and our casing."

Rubensohn frowned and turned away. McCreary grinned sourly at his retreating back. The man was sweating under the fans. There was no insurance on a job like this and he had a lot of money on the table. That was the trouble with a crooked game. The jackpot was big, but a man could grow ulcers waiting for the draw. McCreary knew. He was in the game himself.

So, when they started the motors and the big bit began chewing the soft top soil, there were only McCreary and Agnello and Rubensohn and Janzoon, with the girls and a gaggle of workmen. After they had watched for a while, McCreary led them back to the huts, poured them drinks, and said crisply, "From here on, it's a waiting game. You'll be anxious, so will I . . . but I don't want to be bothered with anything but tending the rig. Agnello can come up every third day to check the motors and dress the tools. Guido will call me morning and evening on the buzzer for any other messages. If I want anything from the ship, it's up to

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you to see that I get it smartly. For the rest, I want to be left alone. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear," said Rubensohn. "But you'll be up here a long time."

"Will you be working all night, too?" asked Janzoon sourly.

"I won't," said McCreary, "but the plant will be. You'll be able to look up at night and see the lights on the derrick and think of the millions you'll have when it blows in."

"You'll have them, too, McCreary," said Rubensohn tartly. "Don't forget that."

"I won't forget," said McCreary gently. "I'll be thinking of them all the time."

When night came he climbed once again to the neck of the valley from which Guido and he had first looked down on the Palace. He carried the field-glasses slung round his neck, and an electrician's torch in his pocket. He set a brisk pace and timed the journey meticulously . . . twenty-three minutes.

When he reached the shelter of the two boulders, he lay down on his belly and scanned the garden and the colonnades behind it. There were lights in the Palace, but the garden and the colonnades were all in darkness.

He took the torch out of his pocket, thrust it out, clear of the rocks and the undergrowth, and flicked it on. A second, no more . . . then he flicked it off again. He waited, his heart pounding, then from the shadows of the garden came a faint pinprick of light, like a lonely star. It was gone so quickly he might have dreamt it, but it told him what he wanted. Lisette was there. She had had the message. She had Guido's torch. She would wait and wait till he was ready to take her.

He raised the glasses again and swept the shadowy area that lay between his eyrie and the wall of the garden. A mile and a half perhaps—no more. But there were no paths and the jungle grew thickly with undergrowth and trailing vines. It would close over his head like a canopy and he would have to navigate by the gradient of the land. It would need practice—one trip and another and another, till he had made a track for himself and had reduced the time to the lowest possible.

He stood up, scanned the hills again, and tried to lay himself a course up the slope and down again to end under the wall of the enclosed garden. Then he moved off. A minute later, the jungle had swallowed him up.

It took him eighty minutes of sweating misery to make the trip. When, finally, he saw the dripping stones of the wall, he realized with a shock of terror that he was a hundred feet below his objective, and that a guard with a long musket was standing on the parapet high above him. He crept back into the undergrowth like a frightened animal, and it took him fifteen minutes to scramble up to the place where the big magnolia hung from the parapet.

He listened. It was better than it looked from a distance—ten

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feet, no more. The branches were almost low enough for a man to leap and hoist himself up with. He fought against a wild impulse to try it there and then. Lisette was so near, yet he could not come to her.

He looked at his watch, then turned back into the sweating shadows of the jungle.

When he reached the camp he found Flame Flower squatting outside his hut, her eyes wide and terror-stricken. He had been away nearly four hours. He undressed and lay down on the bed and Flame Flower crawled into Agnello's bunk.

There were two more slight tremors during the night, but in the morning he found the rig still intact, and the bit still clawing its way down through the first rock layer.

In the weeks that followed, McCreary's days patterned themselves into a comforting professional routine. He rose early and bathed in the stream, then walked back to the hut where Flame Flower would serve him his breakfast. Guido would call him on the radio and they would chat back and forth on the keys, cautiously, for fear of eavesdroppers on the ship.

No messages were being sent by Rubensohn, except one cable to the company in Singapore asking them to replenish bunker credits for the *Corsair* in Luzon and Hong Kong. McCreary let it pass without comment. The credits might come in handy later.

As the bits went deeper and deeper and the casing followed them, McCreary began to take core samples, checking them against the geologist's survey for variations in the strata.

At night he would mark up the log and the chart, then he would tramp up the slope towards the Palace to his observation point and signal to Lisette—only once. When he had seen the small answering light he would plunge into the jungle again and time his walk forth and back from the garden wall. After half a dozen trips, he found he could strike a bearing accurately and make the return journey in two and a half hours. He began to think of getting it down to two.

On the evenings when Miranha came to pick up his drums of fuel, McCreary would walk down to the beach with him and spend an hour fishing in the placid water between the shore and Miranha's mooring. Miranha had prized two more bottles of whisky out of him and now there was a dug-out canoe beached under the bushes and ready for his use at all times.

Every third day, Agnello came up and spent the day dressing the used bits and tuning the motors and checking the electrical circuits. Agnello had made a new ally—the young deck officer, Arturo. They would need him on the final night. For the rest, the news from the ship was negligible. Rubensohn spent much time in his cabin, writing, and studying McCreary's reports. The girls were proving more of a nuisance than a recreation.

McCreary chuckled happily at Agnello's dry reportage. He knew how Rubensohn's temper must fray under the waiting. He regretted only that he couldn't string it out to breaking-point.

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One thing was worrying them all, it seemed—the volcano.

It was more active now than at any time since their arrival. More than once McCreary woke from a shouting nightmare in which he saw the mountain spill over with fire and engulf the Palace and the gardens, while Lisette's voice screamed for help, and he was held back from her by invisible hands.

Finally, one afternoon, a new core sample was brought up. It was black and porous and it looked like a crust of old cement. As he fumbled it, it left a brown, tarry stain on his hands. McCreary looked at it a long time, his lips moving soundlessly, his heart pounding. He knew what it was, he'd seen it before, many times.

The bits had driven down into an old porous layer which sometimes covers the main oil bed and sometimes is the oil bed. To bring in the well, it would be necessary to lower a long section of casing loaded with steel-jacketed bullets. When these were fired by electrical contact, the crust would break up, releasing the oil and sending it gushing to the surface. The surveys had been right. Rubensohn's gamble had been right. There was oil on Karang Sharo—and tomorrow, Mike McCreary would bring in his well. Tomorrow!

For the rest of the afternoon and long after sunset, McCreary drove his crew with a madman's energy. The drill was stopped and winched to the surface. The long steel bullets were loaded into the firing casing and the contacts fused. The casing was lowered slowly down the shaft, and when this was done, McCreary ran a long pair of cable leads to his own hut and carried the contact box there too, and stowed it under his bed.

Then he dismissed the boys and stood a long time staring at the big derrick with its naked struts criss-crossed against the stars . . . Tomorrow!

That night he switched on the radio, put on the headphones, and after a few moments he heard Guido's impatient signal. He was late for his schedule. "Tomorrow . . ." he tapped out the letters with trembling fingers, "warn Agnello. Come yourself in the afternoon, early. No word to anyone. That's all. No more tonight."

"Understood," Guido's message came back. "Understood." And McCreary knew he could rely on them.

He sat down at his table, drew the typewriter towards him and, slowly and painstakingly, began to tap out the letters . . . There were two long documents and one very short one. When he had finished, he folded them carefully and put them under his pillow. He took out his gun and oiled it and tested the action carefully, loaded it, put on the safety catch, and placed it under the pillow with the documents. Tomorrow!

Now, he was deathly tired. His head was buzzing and his hands were trembling, and his whole body reeked with fatigue. He walked down to the creek to bathe himself, and Flame Flower followed him. When he stepped under the racing, cool water, she came with him and soaped and sluiced his body with her soft hands,

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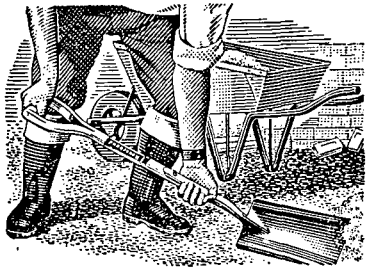

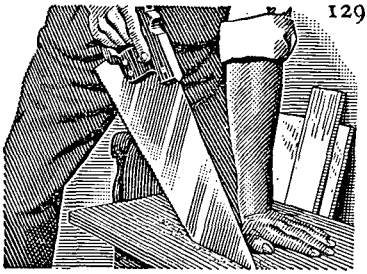

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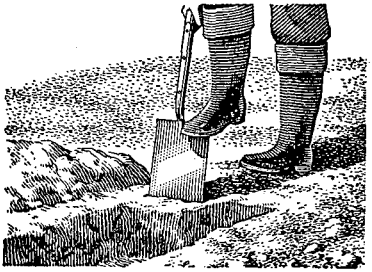

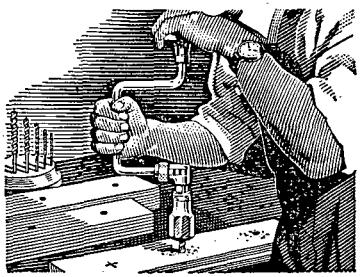

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and dried him and led him back to the hut. He walked like a man in a dream.

When they reached the hut, he told her, very carefully, what she herself must do when tomorrow came. How she must go to the Palace and to the apartments of the women and entertain them with her stories of life with the Tuan, and how she must say to Lisette—foolishly, as if it were a child's mimicry—" Tonight . . . three lights . . . wait! " She must leave the Palace early in the afternoon and come back to him to confirm that Lisette had his message. She nodded wisely and he made her repeat the directions over and over again like a parrot.

Then he lay down on the bed, fully clothed, and fell instantly asleep. Flame Flower heard him muttering and wrestling with his nightmares, and she came to him and soothed him with crooning voice and soft hands, and, after a while, she lay down on the sheets beside him and cradled his head on her breast, so that even when the tremors came, he did not hear them, and when he woke it was already—tomorrow!

When Miranha came up, blear-eyed and inquisitive as a weasel, McCreary took him up to the hut and told him what he wanted of him. The fellow's eyes started from his head and his mouth gaped with the shock of it.

" And if you're not here by sunset," said McCreary brutally, " I'll send Guido gunning for you. Is that clear? "

" Clear, yes . . . but how can you be sure . . . "

" I am sure," said McCreary. " I've got to be sure. Now get to hell out of here and be back by sunset. I want you to take a message down to the ship." McCreary watched him shambling down the path.

Just after four, Flame Flower came back. She had been to the women's quarters. They had welcomed her and petted her and listened avidly to her stories of the Tuans and their strange ways. She had recited her little words to Lisette and the other women had laughed at the mimicry, not understanding a word of it.

Lisette had given her a cambric handkerchief, scented with her perfume. Her message was written on the handkerchief in bright red lacquer: *Mike, come early. Two hours after sunset latest.*

McCreary smiled thinly. Two hours after sunset and she should be back here, in the hut, waiting for Rubensohn and Janzoon. There were no margins in the schedule. He hoped and prayed that Rubensohn and Janzoon would arrive on time.

At five o'clock they dismissed the Sharo boys and within ten minutes the clearing was deserted. At five-thirty, Miranha arrived, red-eyed and unhappy. McCreary sat down and wrote a brief note to Rubensohn: *Drilling-site tonight, urgent conference, self, Janzoon. Expect good news. McCreary.*

He folded it and handed it to Miranha.

" You'll leave here at six by Guido's watch. At normal pace, you'll be aboard before seven. Don't dawdle, don't hurry. If you make a mistake in timing, we're all dead men. Understand that."

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It was twenty minutes to six when McCreary set off up the mountain path to his observation post. In his pockets he carried the torch and the gun. The field-glasses were slung round his neck, and, looped over his shoulders, mountaineer fashion, was a length of rope with a large grappling-hook at the end of it. Agnello had made it for him, covering the hook with rubber tubing so that it would not clatter against the stonework.

By the time he reached the rocks, the swift-striding dark had come down on the island and the cone of Gurung Merapi glowed angrily against the night sky. There was a deep rumbling and the hills shuddered under his feet, then settled again, slowly. From the cone of the volcano, a fountain of fire erupted and fell back through the smoke.

He stood upright against the rocks, holding the glasses in one hand and the torch in the other. Carefully, as if aiming a gun, he thrust it out beyond the rocks and flashed it—once, twice, and again. The answer came back: three short flashes, magnified a little by the glasses but still small and uncertain, like his own hope.

He put the torch in his pocket and set off down the slope and into the jungle. The way was more familiar to him now, its hazards less. Panting and staggering, he came to the base of the wall and leaned against it, fighting for breath. He looked at his watch. He had covered the full distance in forty minutes.

He eased his way up the slope to where the big magnolia tree hung over the wall. The ground was slippery with the drainage from the hill and he had to go carefully. He unslung the rope, and paid out a length of it from the coil, holding the covered hook in his hands. He tried one throw, but he was too cautious and the hook fell back at his feet with a soft thud. He tried another; the hook hung on the wall, but when he put weight on it, the lip of the wall crumbled in a shower of loose rubble. McCreary splayed himself against the stones, trembling.

Carefully, he tried again. This time, the hook held. He tested it with a strong pull, and another, and another. It was still firm. He eased his weight on to it, and began to hoist himself carefully up the wall under the shadow of the branches.

When he reached the top, he hung there, peering into the garden through the small gaps in the leaves.

A moment later, his heart stood still.

The Sultan himself was in the garden, and Lisette was with him, walking slowly by the fountain under the blossom trees.

He dared not hoist himself up any farther. He could not go back for fear that Lisette might leave the garden without his knowing it. He hung there, bracing himself on the rope till his muscles screamed and the sweat broke out all over him and he had to bite his lips to keep from crying out. The ticking of his watch was loud as a death-knell and he knew that both time and strength were slipping away from him.

Then they stopped walking. The small brown figure of the Sultan turned away, but came back, as if on an afterthought. He

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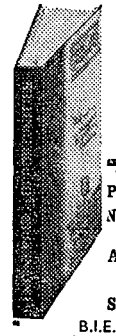

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talked a few moments in a low voice and Lisette bent her head in acknowledgment. Abruptly, he turned on his heel and walked swiftly through the colonnade, leaving Lisette alone.

McCreary eased himself a little higher on the rope and struggled to find breath enough for a whistle. It issued from his lips with startling shrillness. He saw Lisette's head turn sharply. She cast a quick, scared look towards the lighted colonnade, then moved unhurriedly towards the big magnolia tree. "Is that you, Mike?" Her voice was a whisper, but he heard it louder than drums.

"It's me, dark one." His own voice was strained and harsh. "Up into the tree now—hurry!"

He stayed long enough to see her safely into the first branches, holding his breath lest the dry snapping of twigs should bring them running and screaming after her. Then he slid down the rope and waited, tense as a spring, until he saw her, like a white moth, coming over the wall and out of the dark leaves.

"Jump, sweetheart! I'll catch you!"

He saw her hesitate a moment, then she jumped. The impact rolled him over on the slippery incline, but he was on his feet in an instant and without a kiss or come-hither, he was dragging her into the shadows, stumbling over the rotting floor of the jungle.

Before they had gone half a mile, she was gasping with fatigue.

He lifted her face to him and kissed her gently. Then he hoisted her onto his shoulders and carried her a little way until her strength came back and she walked, plugging and persistent, behind him until they came to the camp, with ten minutes to spare before Rubensohn and Janzoon arrived.

Guido laughed and stammered and swore and patted them both on the shoulders, while Flame Flower stood goggling at their tattered appearance. McCreary rounded on them impatiently.

"That's enough, both of you! Time, remember! Time! Get Lisette into the other hut, Flame Flower. Help her to clean up, lend her some clothes . . . I'm sorry, sweetheart, but I want you looking like a queen when Rubensohn comes—for all you're dead on your small, brave feet!"

"I'll be ready, Mike!" Her head went up proudly and the weariness seemed to fall away from her.

"Stay in the hut till I call for you. Guido?"

"Yes, amico?"

"Connect the plunger box."

"I've done it, Mike—it's just outside the door. I thought you'd want it there."

"Good! There's a bundle of assorted stones and jade in my grip. Take it and give it to Flame Flower. Tell her to bring it with her when we go down to the boat."

"Yes, Mike . . . Anything else?"

"Yes, Guido." His voice was soft now and very deliberate. "There'll be a small ceremony when they come. I want no risks at all. If Rubensohn makes half a move—kill him! No questions, no hesitations. Kill him!"

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"A pleasure, compar'," said Guido feelingly. "A very great pleasure indeed."

McCreary grinned crookedly and went into the hut. It took him three minutes flat to change and clean himself, and when Rubensohn and Janzoon came tramping up the hill, he was waiting for them, cool as bog-water, with a cigarette stuck in his mouth and the light of triumph in his eyes.

"Well, McCreary?" Rubensohn's voice was shrill and edgy. His eyes were bright with anticipation and his red lips were startlingly vivid against his pale, perspiring face. "Your message said good news. We hope you'll make up for our spoilt dinner."

"I think you'll find it worth the trip," said McCreary with a grin. "You'll forgive me for being a little elated myself. It's the Irish in me. Come in, gentlemen, and sit down."

He led them into the hut and sat them down at the bamboo table with their faces to the door of the hut. He made a little ceremony of it so that they looked at him curiously, wondering if he'd been drinking. McCreary smiled and leaned against the bamboo upright of the door.

Then he said in his gentlest brogue, "Gentlemen . . . I have good news for you! I'm going to bring you in a well!"

"My God!" Rubensohn's voice was a high bat's squeak.

"You mean it!" Janzoon's was a hoarse whisper. "When?"

McCreary looked at his watch. Fifteen minutes after eight. Time was running out fast. He said briskly, "Very soon now! Tonight! You'll see me leaning on a plunger and you'll count three—or maybe five—and you'll see one of the most wonderful sights in the world—a gusher spouting black, filthy oil up towards the stars. Does it please you, gentlemen?"

"So much!" chuckled Rubensohn. "You don't know how much, McCreary."

"But before I do that," said McCreary, "there's something else I want to show you . . . more wonderful to me than all the oil in the world." He raised his voice and shouted, "Guido!"

A moment later Guido stepped into the hut with Lisette.

Janzoon goggled at her open-mouthed. Rubensohn leapt up from his chair.

"Sit down, Rubensohn," said McCreary's soft voice. "Sit down or I'll kill you!"

Rubensohn saw the gun in his hand and death in his Irish eyes. He sat down. Lisette stood watching him, a small, queenly figure with a strange smile playing about her lips.

"You're mad!" cried Rubensohn shrilly. "You're raving mad! Any minute from now there'll be gongs beating from the Palace and the whole island will come swarming over us, like soldier ants."

"I know," said McCreary. "I've thought about it, often . . . Take their guns, Guido!"

Guido moved swiftly round the table and came back with two guns. McCreary smiled his lopsided smile.

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" So you were going to kill me? That makes it easier all round."

" Listen, McCreary . . . "

" Shut up, Rubensohn! " The smile was gone now and his mouth was tight with anger. " Cover them, Guido! If they move, kill 'em! "

" I know," said Guido, with a flashing smile. " I've thought about it, too."

McCreary put his hand into his breast pocket and brought out a fountain pen and the folded typescripts over which he had laboured the night before. He opened them out and laid them on the table before Rubensohn.

" Sign the first two, please."

Rubensohn looked up at him with cold, hating eyes. " What am I supposed to sign? "

" The first is a will, which is to be witnessed by Guido and Agnello, leaving all your property, real and personal, to Lisette Morand, late of Saigon . . . except the *Corsair* which comes to me, because you owe me money and a lot else that you can't repay. The second is a confession, similarly witnessed, to your murder of Captain Raka in Jakarta on the tenth of July."

" You're mad, McCreary! I'm not going to sign those."

McCreary looked at his watch.

" If you don't," said McCreary calmly, " Guido will shoot you both in five seconds from now. And I'll guarantee to have a signature out of you before you die."

" And if I do sign? "

" I'll bring your well in for you and you can both go back to the *Corsair*."

" Now I know you're mad! " said Rubensohn. " A will has no value until a man's dead."

" You're dead already," said McCreary very softly. " But you don't know it yet. I'm counting now. One . . . two . . . "

" Sign it, Rubensohn . . . for God's sake sign! " Janzoon was sweating in his chair.

" Three . . . four . . . "

" Give me the pen! "

" I know your signature now, Rubensohn," said McCreary easily. " So make sure it's the right one."

Rubensohn scrawled his signature on the first two documents. McCreary took them from him, folded them, and put them back in his pocket.

" What's this? "

Rubensohn was staring down at the last sheet of paper. McCreary said coolly, " That's the message Guido's going to send to Scott Morrison in Darwin telling him there's no oil on Karang Sharo and that the deal is off. And, as you see, it will be signed, like all the others, by Janzoon."

Rubensohn's face was ashen; for the first time since McCreary had known him, there was fear in his eyes and in his twitching lips.

" But . . . but there is oil here! You said . . . "

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"I know," said McCreary. "I promised you oil and I'm going to give it to you—enough to choke you. Then I'm going to . . . Listen!"

They all heard it, a great throbbing brazen gong, echoing out across the lowlands from the Palace on the hill. It went on and on, rising into the hills and falling into the valleys of sound, and from the villages there rose a shrill crying like the wailing of lost souls.

"That's it!" said McCreary. "The alarm. Twenty minutes from now they'll be scouring the island. It should be interesting. You'll both be here to watch it. Then, of course, you'll be taken and killed. At this moment the *Corsair* is steaming out of the harbour with young Arturo at the wheel and Agnello down in the engine-room."

Then the full horror of their situation seemed to dawn on Rubensohn and Janzoon. They gaped, slack-mouthed, and Janzoon tried to lurch forward, but Guido thrust him back. Rubensohn burst into a gibbering plea. "For God's sake, McCreary! Listen! I'll give you . . ."

"You've got nothing to give me," said McCreary. "Strip jack naked! The game's over, Rubensohn! And here's a small souvenir of the moment . . ."

He tossed Captain Raka's lighter on the table. Then, while Rubensohn still stared at it, he turned and led Lisette out of the hut. Guido brought the others out with a beckoning jerk of the pistol.

The island was still full of the clangour of the great gong, but McCreary stood steady as a rock with his hand on the plunger and Lisette was beside him, head high and proud.

"Watch it!" said McCreary exultantly. "Watch it! Count three or maybe five and you'll see it come . . . the thing you killed a man for and sold a girl for . . . the thing you're going to die for, Rubensohn . . . Oil!"

His hand went down on the plunger and they waited, one . . . two . . . But before the count was done, the ground rocked under their feet and they heard a noise louder than a hundred gongs. As they staggered on their feet, they saw that the summit of the mountain seemed to explode, and the air was full of flying particles, as if from a blasted sun, tumbling out of the sky.

Then they were running, helter-skelter down the path—McCreary dragging Lisette, Guido with Flame Flower at his heels, and Janzoon and Rubensohn stumbling after them, shouting, as explosion after explosion rocked the ground and the fiery missiles rained down like thunderbolts.

When they reached the path that led back to the village, they saw for a brief moment the growing terror of the situation. All along the coastline the kampongs were ablaze as the fall-out from the explosions touched off the grass roofs like torches.

They saw the flames and heard the wild, panic screaming, then McCreary dragged them off the path and through the last green tangle before the sea. The four of them reached the beach fifty yards ahead of Rubensohn and Janzoon. The sea was in a turmoil,

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tossing wildly and roaring like storm water. They could see the ketch heaving and straining at its anchor, but Miranha was cowering under the bushes, staring with terror. They kicked him out of his stupor and, between them, they manhandled the canoe down the sand and into the water.

As they climbed into it and pushed off, Rubensohn and Janzoon broke out of the bushes and onto the beach.

"McCreary!" It was Rubensohn's voice, high and despairing.

McCreary did not turn his head.

He and Guido bent to the paddles and sent the canoe bouncing out across the waves to where the ketch was straining at its anchor in the lurching water.

"McCreary! McCreary!"

They were both shouting now, their voices shrill with terror, and, when at last he turned his head, he could see them wading out, waist-high, into the water.

It was desperate, back-breaking labour to hold the plunging craft head on to the waves and save it from being swamped; but after an eternity of clawing their way through the surf they brought up under the lee of the ketch. When they had scrambled aboard, McCreary drove Miranha like a maniac.

"Get those damned engines started! Guido, get the anchor up! The rest of you get down below, if you don't want to be burnt! Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!"

Red-hot pellets were raining down on the deck, and already it was beginning to smoulder. The ketch was bucking like a wild horse. It seemed an age till McCreary heard the splutter of the engines and Guido's shout and felt the boat yaw drunkenly at the first drive of the screws.

The sea was chopping all ways at once, but when the big waves broke over the decks, they were grateful for it, as for a small mercy, because the smouldering pellets doused themselves, and the new falls spluttered out in the wash.

Miranha was driving the engines full throttle now and the little boat was thrusting out, bucking and yawing, towards the lights of the *Corsair*—miles to seaward.

McCreary stood in the stern looking back at the shoreline where Rubensohn and Janzoon stood neck-deep, still shouting their desperate plea. "McCreary! McCreary!"

Then a new shower of blazing particles rained down, and their voices trailed off in a long-drawn scream of agony, quickly quenched as the wild waters swallowed them.

I've stripped him down, McCreary thought. I've stripped him down to this—a face I can't see and a voice drowned in a few seconds. I've taken his girl. I've taken his money. I've taken his life. And though I don't feel very proud of myself, I'm damned if I can feel any pity for him.

Then they rounded the small cape and saw for the first time the blazing horror of the spectacle. The volcano was still spouting fire and roaring like a mad giant, the air was full of a stinking

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sulphurous smoke—and the whole of the shoreline was blazing as if it had been sprayed with petrol.

The people were scurrying like ants, in a panic stampede to the water. Even above the roaring of the mountain, their cry was a high shriek across the leaping waves.

"Mike! Mike! Can't we do something for them?" Lisette was at his shoulder, steadying herself against the yaw. "Can't we go back a way? Pick some of them up?"

McCreary shook his head and shouted to make her hear.

"We'd be burnt and swamped in two minutes. Best we can do is stand in as close as we dare with the *Corsair* and try to pick up survivors. Look!"

She followed his pointing finger and saw the first canoe-loads pushing off from the beach and the small stubby praus lurching out into the water with people fighting to cling to their thwarts.

Before they were twenty yards from the beach, the water spun them up and round, spilling the bodies out like matches and dumping the heavy hulls down on their bobbing heads.

"It's horrible, Mike! Horrible!"

She buried her face in his breast and he held her close to him, swaying with the boat as Miranha pushed and cursed her out towards the *Corsair*.

"Close your eyes to it, dark one," McCreary urged her desperately. "Close your eyes and shut your ears and your heart. You've had pain enough and this you can do nothing to mend. Hold on to me, sweetheart, and you'll feel the soft cool wind stirring over the grass, and you'll catch the pipe of the blackbird and hear the drumming of the hoofs as the sweet fillies turn over the rise and come pounding homeward over the hills of Ireland. Listen to 'em, dark one! Listen . . ."

But even as he spoke, they heard a sound like an enveloping thunderclap, and, as they watched, dumb with shock, they saw the whole hillside open up and a great river of fire slide slowly over the Palace and down towards the villages and the sea.

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McCreary's Luck is to be published by Heinemann under the title McCreary Moves In.

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Speculate.* 9, *Tea-set.* 10, *Garret.* 11, *Tour.* 12, *Bisect.* 13, *Pass along.* 15, *Tom.* 16, *Staple.* 19, *Cab.* 21, *Tapioca.* 22, *Illicit.* 24, *Mab.* 26, *Levity.* 29, *Has.* 31, *Chastened.* 32, *Lentil.* 34, *Vale.* 35, *Baking.* 36, *Fitted.* 37, *Retrieves.*
Down. 2, *Plaint.* 3, *Chrism.* 4, *Lately.* 5, *Titania.* 6, *Peristyle.* 7, *Asleep.* 8, *Statuette.* 9, *Tub.* 14, *Soap.* 17, *Still life.* 18, *Contrived.* 19, *Cam.* 20, *Bib.* 23, *Cran.* 25, *Athlete.* 27, *Vanity.* 28, *Isobar.* 29, *Heckle.* 30, *Seance.* 33, *Lad.*

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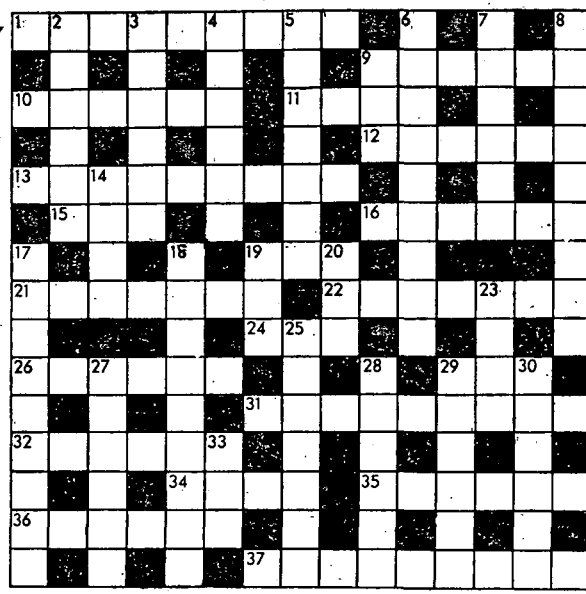
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 143

★



CLUES

Across

1 Wonder how to embezzle a shilling (9).
9 Domestic service, in China perhaps (3-3).
10 Twisted garter goes with poetic life (6).
11 Journey placard on Chaldean bus ? (4).
12 Divide and rule (6).
13 Conductor's plea to passengers (4, 5).
15 Great, he's a bell (3).
16 Principal fixture (6).
19 Hackney in the Inca band (3).
21 Fishes' eyes in nursery parlance (7).
22 Unlawful when still full of whisky (7).
24 Her waggoner's a gnat, Shakespeare says (3).
26 In a tax it makes for frivolity (6).
29 Part of 31 (3).
31 Many hurried and were punished (9).
32 Food appropriate for penitential start (6).
34 Farewell to watercourse (4).
35 Not King Alfred's forte (6).
36 Made suitable size for Edward (6).
37 Brings back the river Tees (9).

Down

2 Poetic lament (6).
3 Consecrated oil (6).
4 Not so long ago (6).
5 Oberon's lady (7).
6 Columns with a fashion finish (9).
7 Change, please (6).
8 Image is bigger without its end (9).
9 Vessel, but reversed (3).
14 Soft, it's flattery (4).
17 Paradoxically, portrays inanimate objects (5, 4).
18 Managed to sound rather forced (9).
19 River or bit of machinery (3).
20 Fish leaves angler all tuckered out ? (3).
23 Berry known at Billingsgate (4).
25 His culture's purely physical (7).
27 Fair failing in Eng. Lit. (6).
28 Well Met., though you'll get no sundae at this bar (6).
29 Ask awkward questions (6).
30 May raise your spirits (6).
33 Youth's in salad days (3).

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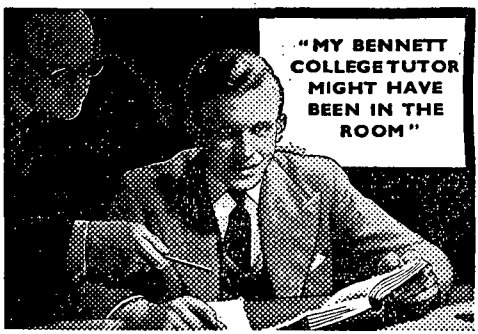

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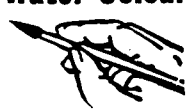

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